





SAINT UDO

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HOW, BY A MORTAL SIN, HE BALKED
A DUKE, PLEASED A PRINCE, AND
SAVED A LADY'S LIFE

BY
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TO
HILDRETH
MY COMRADE OF THE KING'S HIGHWAY

SAIN T UDO

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CHAPTER I

GOOD FATHER UDO, well known throughout Colenna for his charity, his learning, and his comfortable girth, sat meditating in the monastery garden. The warm, friendly sun of Italy shone down upon him from a deep blue sky, the perfume of roses hung on the air about him, and across his consciousness, swelling and ceasing and swelling again, flowed the song of a lark somewhere beyond the garden wall. Little by little that song worked its way into his spirit till from something enjoyed unknowingly it grew to a beauteous reality, like soft melodies awakening a sleeper from his dream.

He stirred, smiling sadly.

‘Happy creature,’ he murmured to the unseen bird, ‘you can sing instead of preaching sermons, which is a blessing to you and to your hearers.’

For Father Udo’s meditations were not the blissful sort that are usually associated with kindness and wisdom and a reasonably well-nourished appearance. Despite sunshine and lark song and the visual enchantment of purple hills, faint with distance, glimpsed through an opening between the

wings of the old monastery, he was not his usual cheerful self to-day, and a sermon was at the bottom of it all. He had been ordered to preach it, and he knew that it was his duty to obey the order, but he certainly did not want to. His business was charity and his pleasure was reading and transcribing old manuscripts, which he handled with the veneration due their age, and this sermon thing had so upset him that it was interfering with both.

Ordinarily he would have been abroad at such an hour on such a day, traversing ill-kept streets at his strange trotting walk, stopping here and there to pat the cheek of some dirty urchin — did not little children belong to the Lord? — carrying cheer to the sick and relief to the needy. For in Colenna it was said that Father Udo's almsgiving was like the miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, so unexpected were his resources when he found want oppressing his charges. But in reality there was nothing miraculous about his bounty.

He had simply appointed himself middleman between rich and poor and had in his modest way made a real art of the business of collecting and giving, with all the craft and none of the ego of the go-getter of a later age. He could find money where others would find nothing but abuse, not only because people knew that he considered himself the

means rather than the end of charity and deducted nothing for nebulous collection expenses, but also because he had unconsciously studied his sources of supply and knew what string to play and what tune to play upon it to appeal to each of the persons who made up the giving end.

He knew that classes and groups are neither the beginning nor the end of things and that mass appeal is no more efficient than indiscriminate giving. Behind all he saw the individual and among individuals the infinite variety that goes to make up a species. Some would give to buy food and not medicine, others to buy medicine and not food. A few wanted direct communication with those whom they helped. And Father Udo had all these so catalogued that he rarely went for aid to the wrong place. But more than this, he knew how to put each in a proper mood for generosity.

To old Count Gregorio, for instance, you talked of strange, obscure philosophers and of the astronomy of the unbelieving Arabians — may they one day accept the true faith — and you quoted bits of Greek and Hebrew, all of which was a pleasure and sometimes tempted the good father to stay so late that he must needs dine with the count. For learning was in a sorry state in the duchy, the duke having no use for it, so that even in the monastery none but Father Udo knew so much as Greek. Latin they

knew, of course; you said mass and read the holy office in Latin, which was not unlike the colloquial dialect of the duchy anyhow, being both its father and its brother, but the tongue of the Turk or of the Persian or even of Plato and Aristotle — there was no one with whom to speak such save Count Gregorio.

And if the count was a little free in his religious thinking, what of it? Also, what if he twitted Father Udo now and then about his early almsgiving? A well-intentioned pleasantry isn't hard to take, and it really was funny how the fraternity of fakirs had imposed on the poor priest when he was just beginning to learn about the world. But then, who would not be taken in by a man who could throw arm or leg out of joint at will and throw it back again with equal facility?

'I wonder why the Lord gave them such a gift?' the priest would marvel when his friend had brought up the subject. 'Everything has its purpose, but —'

'But we are too blind to see it — not like some of these blind beggars who could see a gold coin in the next duchy,' the count would laugh. 'No, old optimist, you're wrong. The only purpose of such a gift is cheating — wherefore I should say that if it comes from the Lord He is made an accomplice.'

Then Father Udo would knit his brows and say,

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'But there must be some use for these people. If one could only find it.'

And the count would assure him that there never had been and never would be the slightest use for such scum. And he took considerable pride in having purged Colenna of them, justifiable pride, perhaps, since he had but moral and economic force to use.

In the count's occasional absences from the city his son Francesco was a good man to whom to appeal for funds. With him you talked of dogs and horses and compared the sword blades of Cordova and Toledo with those of Damascus, for none could ride better or thrust surer than he. But always you reminded him that the sword was a weapon for defense, whether of life or of a lady's honor, and not a thing whereon to skewer people for the sake of glory, which is fleeting, or of vengeance, which belongs to the Lord. You told him this even though you knew that he, in the fervor of his youth, might not entirely agree with you, for there is even more reason for being honest with your thoughts than for being honest with money, since a man's thoughts are part of him, while his money is only his servant, or his master.

Of course it was necessary to be practical about this mental honesty. To laugh heartily at the jokes of Bernardo the silversmith was productive of small

amounts which could do much good when properly administered. Bernardo was very old and very tall and very thin, and his pleasantries were quite as ancient and as stretched out as he, so that laughing at them might not be exactly honest; but it was charitable, more so perhaps than even the distributing of alms.

For quick action in cases of urgent necessity Antonio the merchant was the man to whom to appeal. He had made a fortune trading with the lands of the East and with the barbarous isles of Britain and would give bountifully if the object of the charity struck him as worthy. So much is needed. What for? Why, for a widow whose child is sick. The medico has already said that his comings and goings will be free, but there are simples to buy, and nourishing food is necessary. No, it cannot be done for less, and even the slightest delay may mean the death of the little one. Ah, thank you, Messer Antonio, and may God give fair winds to your ships! That sort of pleading could not be called artistic, but it had the advantage of being swift and direct.

With the ladies Father Udo had recourse to subtleties quite as effective as those which he employed upon the men. Having passed the age where he might appeal to them solely as himself, and knowing full well that he never had possessed much of that sort of appeal anyhow — which shows

him to have been a true philosopher — he saw the wisdom of playing upon the dreams and vanities of each. A bit of harmless gossip here might bring in a few pence. There similar results could be obtained with a word of flattery. Sometimes even a scolding brought its returns.

It profited his work among the poor, for instance, to chide the rich widow Martha for the devastating way in which she used her wiles upon the men. This, he felt, had the added advantage of being quite as charitable as his loud laughter over old Bernardo's jokes, for Martha's wiles were not at all comparable with those of that other widow, the holy Judith, for whom the impious Holofernes had lost his head to the saving of Israel. True, she exercised them, but exercise did not increase their power, and men and their wives lived together as happily after she had crossed their path as before.

Of course one couldn't use that sort of thing with all women. It would not have been exactly politic to talk that way to the Duchess Brescia, though in some ways it might have been more to the point. Untamed and untamable, the duchess was twenty years younger than her husband, Duke Rufio, and Father Udo, in his capacity of confessor — she did not trust the castle chaplain — knew strange things about her.

That was the difficulty with being a confessor.

In your sacerdotal capacity you were technically a different person from that other part of you that ate and slept and sat in the sunlight, but it was impossible to keep the distinction so clear that your right ear didn't know what your left ear had heard. Yet it was only consistent with the secrecy of the confessional that you ignore what you had been told there. You gave advice, you prescribed penances, you might even refuse absolution — though, knowing yourself to be a sinner and fit to judge only as a priest and not as a man, you didn't — but when you had pronounced the words of forgiveness and dismissed the penitent it was your duty to act just as though you did not know that the duchess had her lovers — even as the duke had his own affairs.

And that part of his being which Father Udo tried in vain to leave behind when he entered the confessional did not entirely condemn the duchess. Her husband had won her, as it were, at the point of the sword and held her through a continual threat to her dear ones. The one great flaming love of her life had perished when the army of Colenna stormed her father's castle and young Count Arturo fell in its defense. When she heard that the duke demanded her in marriage she would have thrown herself from the battlements had she not been sure that by so doing she would bring destruc-

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tion upon her father and her brothers. So she had allowed herself to be carried off by a fool who thought that possession was a step toward love. But she felt that the touch of the man defiled her and hated him and herself for it, bearing him no children and amusing herself with deceiving him.

Occasionally she had fits of remorse, but not for hoodwinking her husband. What preyed upon her mind was her surrender, even to save the house of her father, and she dwelt long and bitterly upon this to Father Udo in the confessional. He, poor man, learned in books though he might be, had found that his mortal faculties, even with the aid of the Holy Ghost, were unable to cope with her difficulty. But he had given her what comfort he could, reminding her that the most beautiful of all lives had been one of sacrifice and warning her against the evil spell of hatred and the lusts of the flesh. He had even — God forgive him if it was wrong — suggested that she read from the works of certain pagan philosophers, a slave and an emperor, who were strangely knowing for men who had not seen the True Light.

In the matter of giving, the duchess could not be handled by any special technique. She gave impulsively, handsomely when the spirit moved her, not at all when it did not. Father Udo simply kept coming to her till he caught her in the right mood.

Then his poor were cared for, all of them, and sometimes there was even a surplus which he tried with all his too sympathetic being to guard as the wise Joseph had guarded the fruit of the seven fat years against lean times to follow. Of course he never quite succeeded, but he did his best.

From her chamber Father Udo would go down narrow spiral stairs and along ringing corridors to the bower of the pallid Julia, daughter of the duke by a former marriage. To her he talked of the beauty secrets of Persia and Araby and perhaps brought little jars of perfume from Egypt, the gift of some sea captain in the service of Antonio, grateful for having been shriven, with small penance, of the sins to which sailors ashore in foreign ports are tempted. But he was always uneasy in the presence of Julia and such money as she gave for his charities was well earned. For he never knew what her dark mind might be meditating and he had a feeling that she looked upon him somewhat as did her father, who would confess to none but his own chaplain and be civil to no one less than a bishop.

He felt that he had no right to judge her. Outside the confessional he did not presume to judge anybody. But he could not help feeling thankful that not all women were like Julia. How different was Bianca, daughter of his old friend Count Baldini — might his worthy soul rest in peace — and

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mistress since her father's death of castle and broad estates on the hills across the valley.

His little Bianca! So he had called her since the days when he had patted her tousled head and let her play with his rosary, for he had seen her first toddlings and heard her first lispings — yes, his acquaintance with her had begun earlier than that, on the day when they had presented her to him, a wide-eyed infant, for baptism. And now that she had grown to young womanhood and his hair had turned from gray to white he still had toward her the paternal feeling of long-gone years.

His little Bianca! Could the girl of to-day, be the same who had once clung with tiny fingers to his knee? Tall and lithe, radiating joy, exulting in motion, coursing the fields on her spirited horse, taking fences and ditches with such fearlessness that peasants crossed themselves and muttered prayers for her safety whenever they saw her in the saddle; that was the Bianca that time had raised up. And as he knew from the confessional what her heart was like he wished that more young women might defy convention and strengthen bodies and souls with action. Sometimes when he was depressed or out of sorts he would think of her, and, lo, everything seemed all right again.

But not to-day. He was submerged in too deep a gloom for even her radiance to relieve. Tragedy

had descended upon him in the form of an order from the abbot to prepare a sermon on the virtues of Saint Udo, for whom he was named; a simple and reasonable command as Abbot Lorenzo saw it, but a terrible blow to the poor priest. No matter which Saint Udo he should choose — for there were two — he had no heart for the task assigned him. Doubtless these sanctified ones had their good points; even Judas Iscariot had his — didn't he have the decency to hang himself? — but the fact remained that the good father was on very poor terms with his patron saints.

Saint Udo the Great and Saint Udo the Austere; both had spoiled, as it were, on his hands. In his youth he had greatly admired the former, that intrepid warrior king who carried the cross to Saracen Africa and conquered the upstart Suleiman in the great battle of Sidi bel Abbas. But in his zeal to learn ever more about his hero he had learned too much. There was the little matter of a thousand prisoners beheaded at one moment by a thousand Christian swordsmen as an offering to the Faith. Somehow Father Udo felt that the Founder of the Church did not care for such offerings.

And after all, what had the great king's campaign mattered? Some twenty years later the Moslem had returned to the fight more numerous than before and had wiped out all his gains. And in these

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new armies of the Crescent were noted many stalwart fighters of lighter complexion than their comrades, which seemed to bear out, at least in part, the contention of Arabic writers that the soldiers of the Cross had no more diminished the population of Islam with the sword than they had increased it by another sort of violence, without the opposition and perhaps with the coöperation of their leader.

Upon learning all this Father Udo had transferred his allegiance, not without some sadness, from the conquering king to that more ancient Udo who was known as 'the Austere.' It had been far more difficult to get a picture of this saint than of his namesake the king, for he had lived many centuries ago in Syria and the writings on him were few and for the most part sketchy. But in the works of Talis of Ephesus and Sertorius Minor Father Udo had finally found accounts of him that were more or less what he wanted.

They were also more or less what he did not want, since he was in search of a patron saint. Udo the Austere had been all that his name implied. He had led a life of the strictest purity, had prayed a great deal, and was said to have performed numerous miracles. So far, so good. But he had demanded of others the same austerity which he himself exercised, and as he was something of a power both in state and in church he had been able to visit con-

siderable punishment upon those caught surrendering to the blandishments of the world, the flesh, and the devil. So that there were, according to Sertorius who did not hold it against the saint, almost daily stonings, usually of women, in the streets of Antioch.

Now, Father Udo did not believe in stonings. He remembered that the Master had said to a certain woman, ‘Go and sin no more,’ and he did not see why the Austere One should have tried to improve upon the Master’s teaching. In fact this simple, though learned, priest was inclined to apply his, ‘He that is not with me is against me,’ to the fundamental principles of his doctrine, love and forgiveness and that sort of thing, more strictly than to mere matters of Christian faith as against Mohammedian or Jewish.

So he turned from the second Udo even as he had turned from the first. He preferred doing without a patron saint to placing himself, as it were, in alliance with one or the other of those whose name he had the misfortune to bear.

For years he had managed to ignore them, and he might have gone on doing so to his dying day if the abbot had not ordered that sermon. Now they came forth from their oblivion to mock at him, and he could not shove them back where they belonged. He was bitter about it.

Why, thought he, with such myriads of saints to choose from — all the holy apostles and doctors and martyrs — did he have the misfortune to bear the name of two who seemed to have crept into the number of the blessed through some error? There must be a reason for it — all things had their reason — but how could that reason be found? And how could he, with any honesty, stand before the altar and laud one of these men to the skies wherein he felt that neither had a throne?

The most discouraging thing of all was his lack of spiritual succor. Ordinarily a priest in some serious dilemma would turn to his patron saint for intercession before the One Most High. But no such expedient was possible to Father Udo, who couldn't very well ask either of his namesakes to say a good word for him up there, if they did through some strange circumstance happen to be among those present above, when his greatest concern was to get out of saying one for them down here.

It would not do, for instance, to say, ‘Saint Udo, please tell the Lord that I think you're a rotter and I don't want to preach about you.’

Such things just weren't done.

He hesitated to go before the Throne himself with his troubles, for it seemed to him that the One who had made and regulated sun, moon, and stars and who directed the course of empires should not be

bothered with the troubles of a mere priest in an affair that must seem, compared with pestilences and Saracen invasions, very small indeed. Yet there was that passage in Holy Writ about the sparrow falling. Perhaps if he should pray for direction—

He tried it, speaking to his Creator simply, like a little child, pointing out that it would be dishonest to extol to his fellow men virtues which he considered somewhat worse than doubtful. But his spiritual being, mounting toward the skies, could not drag his senses along. When he should have been trying to picture in his mind's eye the glories which Saint Paul has said are beyond the ken of mortal man he caught himself watching a cloud of butterflies float about in the garden, a whirl of gorgeous aimlessness. And he found himself so lacking in faith that he wanted a sign, a physical assurance that his unworthy prayers had been heard.

All that he got was a gentle tap on the back and the ring of a familiar voice in his ears:

'So this is the way you spend your hours! My parents did me an ill turn when they failed to put me in the Church, where I might enjoy true leisure.'

Brought abruptly from his meditations Father Udo looked up to behold the thin face of his scholarly friend Count Gregorio. What with his prayers

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and the butterflies he had failed to see him enter the gate or cross the garden.

'Oh, it's you,' he sighed. 'I had hoped for an angel from heaven.'

The count wore a pointed white beard. His nose, though sensitive of line, was more prominent than was necessary. Taken individually his features were far from handsome, but in the ensemble their effect was splendid. However, he did not look at all like the popular conception of an angel.

His eyes twinkled.

'Give me time,' he bowed. 'If one day I may but slide into purgatory the rest will adjust itself.'

Ordinarily Father Udo would have warned him, most cheerily, that it was the part of prudence to aim higher, lest he miss even purgatory, but to-day he said nothing. He noted, absent-mindedly, that the count had half a dozen rolls of parchment under his arm, but that meant nothing either, though on another day he would have been reaching out eager hands to find what new literary treasures his friend had unearthed.

Noting his abstraction the count laid a friendly hand upon his shoulder.

'What's the matter?' he asked.

Shrugging, Father Udo glanced about him. Two of his fellow priests were walking up and down in the garden reading their offices, their lips moving

soundlessly as they followed the text. There was no use airing his quarrel with the saints before the whole monastery.

He rose.

'Let's go to the library,' he suggested.

He led the way across the huge refectory and along an airy corridor to the room reserved for learned tracts and venerable manuscripts. There, shoulder to shoulder on rows of shelves, stood poet and philosopher, pagan and Christian. Plutarch and Paul were there, and Aristotle and Augustine, and the great series of Vulgate and Apocrypha, carefully copied and illuminated by devoted men long since gone to their reward.

Below these on deeper shelves were scrolls and palimpsests, some almost illegible with age or by reason of the writing of one work over another. By the window, at the end, was a deal table where Father Udo was wont to study and to write, and along each set of shelves ran a bench, the space between the two being so narrow that people sitting one on each could talk with their heads almost together.

The place was empty, as Father Udo had judged that it would be, for like the rest of Colenna the monks of Saint Holdo's cared little for books.

Motioning his guest to one of the benches the priest took the other. Now that he had decided to

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tell Count Gregorio of his difficulties with the two Udos he felt better and was in no hurry to begin. Once more his eye fell upon the parchments which his friend held in his lap.

'I see you've brought some things to show me,' he observed. 'What is it this time?'

The count let his long, thin fingers run gently over the rolls.

'Some manuscripts of much interest but of little real import,' he replied. 'Some are from Egypt, on real papyrus. We'll enjoy ourselves in the reading of them, eh? But tell me, what troubles you?'

Father Udo drew a long breath.

'My patron saint,' he said.

The count whistled.

'Your patron saint?'

'Perhaps I should say "saints,"' Father Udo corrected himself. 'Think how unlucky I am when I must pray for their souls instead of for their intercession.'

The count raised his eyebrows.

'You aren't satisfied with them?' he asked.

'I am sick to death of them!' Father Udo returned. 'For years I have ignored them, but now the abbot has told me that on my name's day, which is soon, I must preach about the virtues of the one or the other. And if in all the blessed catalogue there is any one of whom I think less than of

Saint Udo the Great it is Saint Udo the Austere.'

A little smile wreathed the count's lips.

'Udo the Great was a glorious warrior,' he ventured.

'So was Attila the Hun,' the priest responded in a tone that for him was very fierce, 'though he bore no cross on his shield. And as for Udo the Austere —'

The count lifted his hand ever so slightly and turned his eyes toward the door. The gesture brought to Father Udo the realization that his voice had risen so high that it must be overheard by any chance passer in the corridor. He stopped short.

'Not long ago,' murmured the count, leaning forward, broad-sleeved elbows upon his knees, 'I read a parchment wherein a certain scrivener of Antioch set forth that certain of the saints had never lived at all, some having come down in tradition to be canonized and others having been created out of nothing, as it were, to fill a special need.'

Father Udo rubbed his tonsure.

'You can't believe those Asiatics,' he remarked.

The count's eyes sparkled mischievously.

'Unless I am mistaken,' he grinned, 'the Bible came from Asia — Moses and the Evangelists and —'

'Moses was born in Africa,' parried the priest.

'Old quibbler,' chuckled the count. 'Well, anyhow, this writer of Antioch quoted as an example of the ethereal ones your Udo the Austere.'

Father Udo gasped with astonishment.

'But what about the testimony of Sertorius Minor and Talis of Ephesus?' he objected.

With a single gesture of his aristocratic hand the count waved aside both those witnesses.

'You will recall, perhaps,' he suggested, 'that Talis of Ephesus wrote very convincingly of the encounter of Saint Barnabas with a seven-headed dragon. And Sertorius Minor lived two hundred years after the date given for your — er, beloved patron saint, and a thousand miles away.'

'Hmph.'

'I had intended to twit you about this,' the count continued, 'but now I see that it is no joking matter.'

'Indeed it is not,' sighed Father Udo, 'and I wish most heartily that I could believe your Asiatic and feel that at least one of my Udos had spared the world his valueless existence.'

'Then why not believe it?' urged the count. 'For I am convinced that at times the fathers of the church have, in their wisdom, seen fit to invent saints of whom they found themselves in need.'

Father Udo shrugged.

'Then I wish they would invent a new patron

saint for me,' he declared. 'For never did man need one more.'

The count stroked his beard. He opened his mouth as though to speak, then seeming to think better of it he closed it again.

'Go on,' prompted the priest. 'You were about to say something.'

Count Gregorio drew a long breath that might but for the smile on his face have been mistaken for a sigh.

'I was going to suggest that you save them the trouble,' he said.

Again Father Udo rubbed his tonsure.

'Save them the trouble?' he murmured. 'You mean that I should ——'

He paused there because he really had no idea what the count did mean.

'Why not?' demanded the other.

'Why not what?'

The count chuckled softly.

'I believe you know what,' he declared. 'Instead of preaching about Udo the Great, who perhaps never got to heaven, or Udo the Austere, who perhaps never even got to earth, why don't you invent a third Saint Udo, a saint really to your liking and ——'

Gasping, Father Udo crossed himself.

'Why, that is unthinkable!' he cried.

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‘Unthinkable? Haven’t I thought of it?’ his friend countered. ‘Why is it unthinkable?’

Father Udo was so utterly overcome by the idea that he couldn’t collect himself sufficiently to find valid arguments against it. Instead there rushed to his mind a certain sort of *argumentum ad hominem*.

This person who had the appearance of his old friend might be the devil in disguise — an easy disguise to assume, too, since the count admitted, in confidence of course, that he was a free-thinker. And the devil was full of such tricks.

He recalled that he hadn’t seen him cross the yard. Perhaps there was good reason for that. Perhaps this being was a mere apparition that had materialized at his elbow.

He looked him over very carefully. He could see no trace of horns, and the count was sitting too comfortably to have a tail coiled out of sight under him. Still, Satan was full of wiles and you couldn’t be too careful.

Raising his eyes Father Udo noted a little bowl of holy water on the top shelf above his visitor. Seized with a sudden urge he sprang up and reached as though for a book, sending bowl and holy water down upon the head of the count, which was not so bad as it sounds, as the container was light and there was little liquid in it.

‘Oh, excuse me!’ he gasped.

The count neither cringed nor vanished at the sprinkling and Father Udo sat down again, satisfied with his genuineness.

'It's all right,' said the nobleman as he brushed the drops of water away. 'No harm done. Now tell me why it is unthinkable.'

'Oh,' Father Udo had forgotten that he was trying to think up an argument.

He bended down and picked up the bowl.

'Why, ah, the news might get to Rome,' he faltered, 'and heaven knows what would happen to me then.'

He rested his chin in his hands and sat silent for a while, thinking. A patron saint of the sort suggested by the count would come in handy. Imaginary characters can be endowed with a flexibility impossible for people with real histories. But —

'Then there's the abbot,' he breathed.

'A well-spoken man but not well-read,' the other replied. 'You and I know that he reads no language but Latin, though he keeps it well hid.'

Yes, that was true. Abbot Lorenzo was a good organizer and a first-class politician, but he was indeed no more of a scholar than any other of the priests of Saint Holdo's.

And since this was really the count with him and not the devil might not some importance be attached to his visit? He had slapped Father Udo

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on the back just as he was asking for a physical sign that his prayers had been heard. After all, was it necessary that an angel with a trumpet be sent?

‘Well,’ asked the count. ‘What are you thinking of?’

‘I was just wondering.’

‘What?’

‘Whether you are really the angel from heaven for whom I prayed or ——’

‘If you prayed for an angel and I am here you may draw your own conclusions,’ laughed the count.

He rose, shoving his rolls of manuscript at the priest, who let them fall in a cascade at his feet.

‘I must go,’ he said. ‘But I’ll leave you these manuscripts. They might come in handy.’

He strode over to the door, where he paused to look back at Father Udo, still sitting there as in a trance.

‘There’s not one of them that the abbot can read,’ he grinned, and was gone.

CHAPTER II

CHANCING to pass the door of the library some little time after the count's departure, Abbot Lorenzo glimpsed Father Udo within, apparently musing over certain rolls of manuscript which he held in his lap. The abbot paused in the doorway. He saw that the good father must be very deep in his thoughts, for he showed no awareness of his superior's presence.

He smiled. The gentle priest seemed to fit his setting so well! Rows of books: in the background a work table with ink and pens: and on a long bench beneath ancient parchments the heavy, black-clad figure with bowed white head. Such calm features! Such peaceful mien! Here was all the simplicity of wisdom, all the composure of goodness. Yes, and no practicality whatever.

But not every one could be practical. That was the abbot's own business. Sometimes he wished that less of it might be required of him, that he too might find time to acquaint himself with the great thinkers of old and learn to decipher strange writings so that the whole of learning would be at his hand. Perhaps in his heart of hearts he knew that he only wished this because he felt that he should. Perhaps he enjoyed the thought of academic pursuits far better than he would have enjoyed the

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pursuits themselves. Perhaps he was even thankful in a way for the routine of administration that took off his conscience the burden of realization that he was not doing what he ought to want to do. But at any rate it was strange that the practical abbot should desire in vain the thing that the impractical priest possessed.

It was not the sort of thing, however, which prompts jealousy and it always pleased Abbot Lorenzo to see Father Udo in the library amid books and scrolls, for he realized that no matter how small might be the negotiable value of learning it was well to keep up appearances of it in the abbey, and this one priest was the only person there with an inclination to do so. There had been a time when Saint Holdo's was renowned for its devotion to letters, when every cell in the building contained a monk transcribing and illuminating works, sacred and profane. That it had fallen from this state was no fault of the abbot's. He had merely taken things as he found them on his accession, the very old priests had died off, and there you were.

He might have tried remedial measures had he not been busy trying to solve a problem which to him seemed far more serious than the decadence of letters — the estrangement of the abbey from the castle. In the old days the dukes had supported Saint Holdo's handsomely. Right up to the time of

Lorenzo's immediate predecessor this happy relation had continued. Then all support and favor had been withdrawn.

For that other abbot, dead these seven years, had rebuked Duke Rufio for certain scandalous affairs, much as John the Baptist had rebuked Herod, and the consequences were not much less unfortunate. Being a reasonably saintly man, he had naturally been no politician and from him Abbot Lorenzo had inherited a very difficult situation, particularly as the duke had little use for religion anyhow and felt no need whatever of the services of the priests.

But Lorenzo did not despair, and his occupation with his problem had given him the habit of viewing all things in the light of their possible value in solving it. This was another reason why he smiled upon Father Udo, for the simple priest had lately appeared to him as a very likely instrument for his purpose. The good father's charity, his learning, his popularity with the citizens and therefore with the bishop, who was himself not unaware of the wisdom of showing favors to friends of the people, even his name contributed to it.

This was what lay back of the order for a sermon on Saint Udo. The saint's day fell on Sunday this year, and on that Sunday Prince Gustav, the Emperor's envoy, would be at the castle. Being a man who knew the political value of an appearance of

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devoutness, the prince would doubtless take care to appear in the cathedral where all the people might see him, and if the envoy went the duke could not well stay away. Behold a splendid opportunity to compliment the temporal head of the duchy not only before all the townsfolk but even in the presence of the representative of the temporal head of the Christian world! Such a compliment might well pave the way toward the reconciliation which the abbot so desired.

And who was more capable of accomplishing such a task than the learned priest who sat there with his lap full of manuscripts? There might be others more eloquent than Father Udo, but there was no one who could make such a show of erudition, if the good father would only do so. Furthermore, the abbot knew that the pulpit of the cathedral was always open to Father Udo and would be so particularly on his name's day, while it was never available to any other of Saint Holdo's priests. That was really the crux of the matter.

Having told Father Udo that he was to preach and given the idea time to sink in, Abbot Lorenzo wanted to speak further about it, to make some suggestions as to what to say and how to say it. He advanced into the room. Father Udo looked up and made as if to rise, but the abbot motioned to him to remain seated.

‘Don’t disturb yourself,’ he said. ‘You are doubtless thinking of your sermon.’

Father Udo always found his superior a bit dazzling to the eye. Tall and broad and very erect, proud of mouth and eye, with a jeweled cross of gold upon his breast, he made one think of the ‘Church Triumphant.’ But of course that expression referred to the faithful who were enjoying their reward in heaven.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘I have thought of nothing but that sermon since you told me that I should give it.’

The abbot smiled.

‘I wonder if you have ever been struck,’ he put forth, ‘by a certain similarity of character between our duke and Saint Udo the Great?’

Father Udo nodded gravely.

‘They have much in common,’ he agreed.

His superior’s smile broadened. Things were going beautifully.

‘I expect that the duke will be at high mass on Saint Udo’s day,’ he went on, ‘along with the Emperor’s envoy.’

Father Udo looked up hopefully. He had an idea.

‘Then you will doubtless want to give the sermon yourself,’ he ventured. ‘I am not very eloquent and I make a miserable appearance in the pulpit. I

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feel much more at home among my books and my poor.'

The abbot laughed.

'Oh, no,' he declared. 'Surely no one in the duchy knows as much about Saint Udo as you.'

Father Udo smiled ruefully.

'Too true, alas,' he replied. 'But I had much rather —'

'Besides,' continued the abbot, 'you know the bishop wouldn't let me.'

Father Udo sighed. Ever since the departure of the count he had been deliberating upon the spiritual advisability of creating that new patron saint, hoping that Heaven would send him a way out. And the momentary gleam which the abbot had given him had but served to make his despair seem the more dark. He was being forced to it despite his appeals to Heaven for help.

Yet he knew that he had no right to blame Heaven. Inscrutable though its ways might be they were none the less wise and just. And — why, perhaps Heaven wanted him to do this thing. Hadn't he already noted the timeliness of the count's arrival, just as he was praying for a sign? And hadn't the count suggested the ruse?

He made the sign of the cross. Heaven's will be done!

'Very well,' he told the abbot. 'You are my

superior, and I am old enough to know the virtue of obedience.'

The other clapped him on the shoulder.

'Good,' he replied. 'And you will not forget to make reference to our duke.'

'I shall remember him,' bowed Father Udo.

'Perhaps comparing him with Saint Udo the Great,' suggested the superior.

Father Udo hesitated. Getting started on a thing like this was not so easy.

'I hadn't intended to preach on Udo the Great,' he said.

The abbot looked hurt.

'It is his day, though,' he returned. 'And it seems to me that he is better suited to our purpose than Udo the Austere.'

He was quite right, and he intended that Udo the Great be the subject of the sermon no matter what Father Udo thought about it. But there was no use being too insistent at first. He could save that sort of thing till it should be needed, for he felt that he would probably get much better results through diplomacy. The trouble was that he had no idea how Father Udo felt about his saints.

And Father Udo? He felt a catch in his throat and a throbbing in his chest but he did not hesitate with his reply. That would have been poor psychology.

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‘Yes,’ he declared, ‘you are right. But I hadn’t thought of him either. I chose the third Saint Udo for my subject.’

The abbot hesitated. This was a poser to him. He knew of no third Saint Udo, and if this was through lack of information he did not want his ignorance to become known.

‘The third Saint Udo?’ he mused. ‘Somehow he seems to have slipped my memory.’

Father Udo smiled.

‘That is not to be wondered at,’ he returned, ‘since you have so many things to occupy you in the administration of the monastery. And here in Saint Holdo’s our catalogue of the saints is not complete.’

‘But are you sure ——’

Father Udo felt the count’s manuscripts beneath his hands. His friend’s departing words came back to him, ‘There’s not one of them that the abbot can read.’

‘I was just glancing over this parchment,’ he said as he unrolled one and held it out to his superior, ‘and I know of no work in which his life and virtues are better depicted. Look. Read for yourself.’

The manuscript in question was an Egyptian translation of a Greek commentary upon the Al-Teysir of the Hispano-Moorish physician Abu Merwan Abd el-Malik Ibn Zohr. To the abbot it

was but a series of peculiar characters. But he had long since found out that lack of knowledge of a subject was best covered up by agreeing with statements which he was not prepared to refute.

Running his eye over the sheet he nodded.

'Oh, yes,' he murmured. 'Strange that I had forgotten.'

Leaving him holding the scroll Father Udo hastened to pick up another.

'And you can see,' he went on, 'that this one by no means contradicts it.'

This was quite true, for the writing in question was an inventory, in Hebrew, of the stock of a trading firm in Joppa. He handed it to the thoroughly uncomfortable abbot, who still held to the first as though not knowing how to get rid of it, and reached for another. And the abbot, seeing himself threatened with an inundation of manuscripts, thrust the scrolls back at the priest.

'Oh, take them with you,' urged Father Udo, waving them aside, 'and study them at your leisure. I want you to understand why I have chosen Saint Udo the Martyr.'

Then and there the abbot saw that diplomacy would not work. Any man who has decided that a thing must be done and has the authority to compel it is foolish to argue about it with some one who knows more than he.

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‘I don’t think that it will be necessary,’ he said stiffly, as he forced the writings back into Father Udo’s hands, ‘and I still think that Saint Udo the Great is the man for our purpose.’

‘If it please your —’

‘No more,’ broke in the abbot. ‘Go to your cell and meditate upon the virtue of obedience, which you claimed to know something about but a few moments ago.’

Father Udo stretched out his arms in supplication, but his superior went on sternly.

‘I have chosen Udo the Great for you, and on him you shall speak. You don’t seem to realize how important it is for us to get back into the good graces of the duke.’

‘But —’

‘No more! Go to your cell. I’ll send a brother with bread and water for your supper — and your breakfast — and your luncheon. But if you should decide, as a result of your meditations, to do as I say, why, tell me about it this evening when you dine at my table. I am having capon.’

The ‘Church Triumphant’ swept out of the room, while Father Udo, gathering up his manuscripts, went heavily along the corridor to his cell.



CHAPTER III

JULIA, daughter of Duke Rufio, lay on the tumbled luxury of her silken bed, a frown on her brow, her brooding gaze fixed upon the tall window which looked out over castle yard and city. Her slim body was tense, her fists clenched with ill-controlled anger, and ever and again her bosom heaved and her breath came and went in an ominous sigh and sob.

She was in one of her dark moods, for like her father she was subject to tempers and to moments of cruelty. She had inherited much from Duke Rufio, his vanity, his love of luxury, his petulance when anything was denied him. Despite the good fortune of her position she could be madly jealous over little things and furious when her will was crossed in greater ones. And just now her vanity had been so hurt and her jealousy so aroused that she was beside herself.

She had seen Francesco, Count Gregorio's son, who sat so well upon a horse and could sing so softly beneath a silver moon, riding by with that Bianca Baldini from across the valley. Bianca Baldini, the shameless one who sat her mount like a man, yet possessed a certain boyish beauty that turned the heads of fools. What then? Did Francesco prefer

such a one to the duke's daughter? It would be better for both if he showed more sense.

She hated the woman! She hated all women! Her stepmother the duchess, but a few years older than herself, she hated most of all — except that Bianca. How should this captive duchess, conquered by the sword, be mistress of the castle when she, Julia, deserved the place by right of birth? And how was it that she gathered about her admirers that should have been Julia's own, receiving from them attention and adulation to which no married woman had a right?

Oh, they might say that there was no harm in it! No harm to whom? To the duke? Well, how about the duke's daughter? Was not the duke's daughter beautiful? Her mirror told her that she was. Was she not as beautiful as the duchess — as that damned Bianca? Vile creatures, both of them; some day she'd make them wish that they had been born ugly as crows, or never been born at all!

Yes, some day she would rid herself of this plague of hateful women! Some day! What good did that do her now? She must smash something to bits, hurt something, kill something!

Wrenching a tassel from the pillow beneath her head she threw it to the floor.

'Maria?' she called, springing to her feet.

Her maid entered timidly. She had known these moods before.

'My lady called?' she asked.

Julia stood watching her. The maid did not dare raise her eyes.

'Yes, I called,' snapped the duke's daughter. 'I want to ask you a question.'

'Yes, my lady.'

'Which is more lovable, a man or a woman?'

Maria looked up. She was but the day before betrothed to Umberto Lancia, captain of the castle guard, and the answer to such a question seemed so easy when his kisses still burned upon her lips.

'To me, a man,' she said.

'What?'

Julia sprang at her, a slender storm of fury. Poor Maria had given the wrong answer because there was no right one. She happened to be a convenient outlet for her mistress's rage, that was all. And though she might be stronger than Julia she could not struggle, for one did not fight with the daughter of the duke. That would mean — well, almost any punishment she might think of. So she crouched against the wall, growing fainter and fainter while her mistress overwhelmed her with a torrent of blows.

At last Julia's fury began to cool. She was about to release her victim when she heard her father's

familiar rap at the door. Then, knowing that she would soon be interrupted anyhow and wishing to provide a more striking scene for his entrance, she seized the unresisting girl by the hair and dragged her to the center of the room, where she clutched her cruelly by the throat.

‘Treason!’ she screamed, that she might be heard beyond the door.

The duke burst into the room and found them so, with Maria slumped to her knees and Julia bending fiercely over her.

‘Ho!’ he cried, as he slammed the door behind him. ‘What’s this?’

Throwing the swooning Maria to the floor his daughter turned upon him, fists clenched, eyes blazing.

‘She is a foul traitress,’ she hissed. ‘If I had my dagger ——’

Turning, she dashed for the bed, drew a gleaming bit of steel from beneath a cushion, and started back, her hand clutching the jeweled hilt. But the duke caught her wrist and wrenched the weapon from her.

‘Softly, my daughter,’ he chid. ‘What folly is this? Killing is a man’s work.’

The lady Julia stared at him defiantly. She had calculated upon his stopping her. Her play with the dagger had been mere acting, partly for her father’s

benefit and even more for her own. She meant no further harm to the luckless Maria, who lay stretched out upon the floor, eyes closed, lips parted, hair in a mass about her face, but she felt the necessity of feeding her fury lest she become ashamed of herself.

'I've told you that she is a traitress,' she snapped.

The duke looked from his daughter to the girl. His eyes fell upon a white shoulder, exposed by the tearing of her gown. He thrust the dagger into the belt beneath his robe and stood stroking his beard.

'A very pretty traitress,' he murmured. 'Why have you not let me see this jewel before? And what has she done?'

'Enough!'

'But what?'

'I asked her whether man or woman was more lovable, and she simpered, "To me, a man."'

'Which is but natural,' smiled the duke, 'since she is a woman.'

Julia stamped her foot.

'I was not thinking of that,' she cried. 'What I mean is that here am I, a very woman, with a woman's arts and keeping a woman's place ——'

'Yea, and with the lust for blood of a Turk,' mocked her father. 'But go on.'

'In the Castle Baldini lives that Bianca who rides about like some silly squire, forgetting that she

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is a woman at all, yet Francesco would appear to put her before me.'

'Francesco?'

'Count Gregorio's son. Fool that he is, he yet has a fascination for me.'

The duke rubbed his cheek.

'Pity the poor boy,' he breathed, 'with two such ladies to turn his head first this way and then that. For I must admit that Bianca Baldini has her charms. If I were single — but why speak of that? I am not single. In fact I have come to talk with you about my duchess.'

Julia drew an impatient breath.

'Must I always talk and think of people whom I detest?' she fumed. 'But for her I would be mistress here! And now what am I? What have I?'

The duke let his eye roam about the apartment with its wealth of gold and brass vessels, its silken hangings, and its canopied bed.

'Well,' he shrugged, 'you have an apartment worth a king's ransom.'

His glance rested upon the motionless Maria.

'And you are so rich in maids that you don't seem to mind killing one if you are moved by some foolish fit.'

Again he stroked his beard.

'Don't hurt her again,' he warned, shaking his head. 'She has struck my fancy.'

He pulled the dagger from his belt.

'I'll give you back this bauble,' he went on.
'And by the way, the jewels in its hilt are worth
more than the dower of many a gentlewoman.'

He tossed it back upon the bed.

'But daughter, let us not quarrel,' he continued.
'I own that the duchess perplexes me. Never be-
fore have I known a woman who would not give
me love. Yet this one takes my gifts, graces my
table with well-garnished beauty, and — and is as
cold to me as the snows of the Alps.'

This last came out bitterly and with a rush, as
though it hurt so to say it that he must be through
with it quickly.

'Well?' demanded Julia.

'Can it be that she is incapable of love?' he quer-
ied. 'Oh, I know I took her by force. But I have
treated her well — given her more than she could
ever have hoped for if she had not known me. And
she shows not even gratitude.'

Shrugging, Julia turned away.

'No woman is incapable of love,' she said.

'But she shows me none.'

Julia's eyes glittered as she turned back to him.
Here was her chance to put into his head an idea
which might well work the destruction of one of the
women whom she hated. Perhaps she suspected
something about the duchess, perhaps not. Surely

she knew nothing. But she was well aware that her father could brood over a thing even as she could.

‘Are you the only man in the duchy?’ she cooed.

The duke gasped. His face darkened.

‘Keep a civil tongue in your head,’ he warned, ‘or I’ll tear it out.’

Julia laughed.

‘You are twenty years older than she,’ she persisted. ‘And she owes you nothing. Much as I hate her I’ll tell you that if I were she ——’

‘Silence!’ roared the duke. ‘Do you think that she would dare ——’

His daughter went serenely on.

‘A woman will dare much for love, and more for hate. Oh, I don’t say that there is anything to it, but you mustn’t presume so much on your charms as to think that with you around she can love nobody else.’

The duke grunted and glowered. He had been doing exactly that, for his vanity was great. And his face grew red, then white with anger as Julia drove home her point.

‘There are interesting young men who call often at the castle, and not to see me.’

‘They come to see me!’ shouted the duke, who was now defending his vanity rather than his duchess.

‘How romantic!’ mocked his daughter.

Then she shrugged and turned away again as she continued, ‘But don’t mind what I have said. I am doubtless mistaken. Only it would do you no harm to find out.’

She moved about the room, fixing the folds of a curtain here, moving an ornament there, putting the jeweled dagger back under the pillow and patting the bed. She had sowed the seed of suspicion, now she could wait to see what sort of plant would spring from it.

The duke stood silent. Could Julia be right? Could this be the reason for the coldness of the duchess? It didn’t seem reasonable that she would turn from him to some one less noble of birth, less powerful, less wealthy. But women are strange creatures and — it would be well to make sure.

He craved romance, for he was at the age where it assumes its greatest importance, having become one of those blessings which brighten as they take their flight. And instead of being warm flesh and blood the duchess was as cold marble. If he could not win her, then it would be best to be rid of her before it was too late.

He thought of the boyish Bianca Baldini. But no. It was silly! Was he not the duke? How could any one make a fool of him in his own castle? Yet if this duchess of his had done so —

The law prescribed death for such a woman,

death by stoning. And with her gone he would be free to take another duchess, one who would perhaps —

‘Find out, say you?’ he growled. ‘How?’

Julia turned from arranging a Moorish cushion.

‘Ask your good adviser Martin,’ she suggested, ‘that long-faced concocter of poisons to whom you turn for your wisdom. Or you might —’

She paused, smiling. It was better not to seem in too much of a hurry.

‘What?’ demanded the duke. ‘I might what?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Out with it!’

Julia walked back toward him. Stopping before him she posed a question.

‘Does she confess to Father Pietro, your chaplain?’

‘If she does I’ll soon find out from him!’ declared her father.

‘But she doesn’t,’ thrust Julia. ‘Now why do you suppose that should be?’

As he did not reply she went on.

‘Perhaps because she knows that Father Pietro belongs rather to the duke than to the church. What other reason could she have for shunning his ear?’

Angrily the duke slapped his thigh.

‘To whom does she confess?’ he demanded.

‘To Father Udo from the abbey,’ Julia told him.
‘It might do no harm to ask him a question or two.’

The duke clenched his fists.

‘I will,’ he muttered. ‘I’ll send a squad of soldiers for him and ——’

‘No, no, no,’ smiled his daughter. ‘Remember, you are sure of nothing. It would be better to make friends with him. Invite him to dine with you. Give him presents. And don’t be in too much of a hurry about using force. Ask Martin if I am not right.’

The duke had turned and was glowering out the window at the rambling old abbey beyond the city wall. He didn’t like those priests over there anyhow. One abbot of Saint Holdo’s had even dared scold him for a certain looseness of morals. And now within the cloisters of the troublesome place might be hidden a secret shameful to him.

‘I must know,’ he muttered. ‘He must tell me. There is nothing in life so foul as unfaithfulness. And if she is guilty ——’

He swung sharply about.

‘I’ll do as you suggest,’ he said, ‘unless Martin has a better plan.’

Again his glance took in Maria, still stretched out upon the floor.

‘Why,’ he gestured, ‘we’ve left this poor girl in a swoon and given her no help.’

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He bended over her. She opened her eyes.

‘She is pretty indeed,’ he whispered. ‘For shame that you should spoil her beauty with your tempers!’

Kneeling down, he lifted her to her feet.

‘Poor pretty thing,’ he said, ‘I must make amends for what my daughter has done.’

Maria ran her hand over her forehead.

‘It is nothing,’ she murmured. ‘I feel better now. If you permit I shall go.’

But he held her tenderly, too tenderly.

‘No,’ he insisted. ‘The duke’s daughter has mistreated you. The duke himself must comfort you.’

Turning to Julia he motioned with his hand.

‘Daughter,’ he ordered, ‘go to the chapel and pray for forgiveness for having struck this beautiful creature. From now on I want to see more piety in you.’



CHAPTER IV

ALTHOUGH the abbot had walked from the library in a state of high indignation, he did not at all like to discipline Father Udo. The old priest was kindly and good-natured and ordinarily quite willing to do as he was told. And there were not many men who could, as it were, nurse the spark of charity with one hand while they fanned the flame of learning with the other.

But this was a serious matter, an all important moment. Why couldn't Father Udo have some sense of policy? Why must he insist on talking about an obscure martyr saint of whom the abbot had never even heard when he might accomplish great things for Saint Holdo's with a properly pointed sermon upon the virtues of Saint Udo the Great? Think how fine it would be to do away with all the existing misunderstanding and end a situation wherein the duke refused to recognize so much as the existence of the monastery, or of the abbot! Such a thing could, without exaggeration, be called a service to the Lord.

And if Father Udo did not recognize it as such he must be starved into submission. The good priest was by no means unappreciative of savory meat and a drop of good wine, and he should have neither until he would come to reason. Too bad that such

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a thing was necessary, that the abbot himself could not give the sermon, but the bishop's coldness to Saint Holdo's did away with all thought of that.

Of course a proper talk on this Udo the Martyr might serve the desired purpose, but if Father Udo was stubborn about the subject of his discourse he was likely to be equally so about its purpose. And the question of discipline was involved. Who was running the abbey, anyhow? That would shortly be seen.

Father Udo, for his part, had gone to his cell very perplexed. What did Heaven really want him to do about his saint? Had it sent him the count or had it sent the abbot? The latter bore the banner of the Lord, but he was asking something that could not, in conscience, be done. Of course he didn't know that, but Heaven did. And Heaven was not likely to be unreasonable.

Perhaps it had sent neither. That was a possibility. Or both! Was not the abbot supplying the difficulty and the count suggesting the way out? Viewed in that light they made a perfect team. But that predicated a need for Udo the Martyr beyond anything that he could picture. Heaven wasn't so inefficient as to create difficulties just to knock them over. Could there be some inner meaning, some deeper purpose?

Inner! Deeper! Oh, why had he thought of

those words? They suggested the stomach, and the stomach suggested, nay demanded, food. And to-night food meant merely bread and water. He was hungry. He had no right to be, as he had neither exercised nor fasted to-day and it was not yet dinner-time, but he was. There you had one of the contradictions of life, one of the tyrannies of the material being over the spiritual. He was hungry simply because he knew that he would get nothing, or next to nothing, to eat.

The abbot would dine on capon to-night! And he could share that succulent dish if — What a pity to miss it if he were wrong! Well, he'd have to. If Heaven should send him a further sign, of one thing or the other, he might go on bravely or surrender comfortably, but Heaven took its own time about such things. You couldn't expect it to hasten its schedule to get in ahead of the dinner bell.

Perhaps there would be capon another time anyhow. And there were other dishes quite as delightful — roast pig and lobster and squid, deep fried. Squid, deep fried! After vespers a brother would be along with bread and water. But fasting was good for the soul, and sometimes for the body. Was it not prescribed for Lent and Advent by Holy Church?

Capon to-night! Foolishness! Think how scornfully the Master had replied when the evil one

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tempted Him to change stones into bread. Not by bread alone. Ouch! Bread alone. That's what he was to have to-night. But that was not what the Master had meant. Would he never train his stomach to stay out of such arguments? The Master had been scouting the material side of life. There were more important things; spiritual things. And that did not mean prayers so much as ideals.

He would stick by the ship. And some day the count would invite him to stay to dinner — to dine on squid, deep fried. There, he'd thought about it again! He wished that he could stop. That squid had wrapped its tentacles around his heart and —

But how about Saint Udo the Martyr? Just what sort of man should he be? The best thing to do was to copy his life after that of the Master. Of course it couldn't be exactly like His, for some of the copyist's personality was bound to get into such a work. Saint Udo would simply be his own idea of what a real Christian should be — kind and peaceful, joyous yet self-sacrificing, willing to forgive the shortcomings of others more readily than his own. Oh, he could be made quite a fine person if Heaven willed! And all Heaven had to do was send a sign.

So they were meditating, the abbot and the priest, when a messenger wearing the livery of the duke arrived at the monastery. Upon being told by

the brother at the door that such a person was without Abbot Lorenzo was seized with grave misgivings, for the duke's messenger could not but be the harbinger of trouble of one sort or another. But he put on a brave front and met him with an outward smile and an inward murmur of, 'Now what can the matter be?'

The herald doffed his plumed hat. The abbot nodded and asked a blessing upon him, reflecting that the fellow showed better manners than he had expected.

'You have a Father Udo here?' asked the duke's man.

Father Udo again! Would he never cease bringing trouble upon the monastery? Not that he had ever caused much before. No, to be fair, he hadn't. But —

'Yes,' replied the abbot. 'I hope he has not in any way offended his grace.'

'On the contrary,' bowed the herald, 'his grace, having heard of the knowledge of that illustrious scholar, requests his presence at dinner to-night.'

For a moment the abbot stood stunned. An invitation from the duke to one of his priests, to that very Father Udo who — Why this was — Why —

Collecting himself he smiled and returned, in miniature, the other's bow.

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'Give my compliments to the duke,' he said, 'and tell him that Father Udo will be there.'

'At eight o'clock,' the herald informed him.

'At eight o'clock.'

Bowing again, the herald took his departure; whereupon the abbot wheeled about and hastened off to the cell of the priest. Beside himself with delight he burst in upon Father Udo, completely bewildering the good man.

For of course Father Udo was not prepared for such a change in his superior. In the middle of a meditation wherein foods and Christian virtues revolved ceaselessly about a worried brain and an empty stomach, to have Abbot Lorenzo rush in and embrace him, panting strange things about some 'great opportunity' and 'your position' and 'didn't know what you were doing for us' and so on was a little too much for him.

Nor did his mind find anything to focus on till the abbot stood off and looked him over, observing:

'That cassock is patched. Have you no better one?'

Father Udo looked down at the offending cassock. Yes, it was indeed patched, in more than one place. And as he had done the work himself and was to say the least no seamstress, it did seem, now that his attention was called to it, a bit shabby.

'I'm sorry,' he apologized. 'It is all I have.'

'You can't go to the castle that way,' fretted the abbot.

'To the castle?'

'Yes, haven't you heard me? You are going to the castle to-night to ——'

'But I have often been there this way.'

The abbot staggered.

'Holy Mary!' he gasped. 'You have often been there? Why didn't you tell me? Why be so modest about what you are doing for us?'

Again he looked at the ancient cassock. 'Still,' he remarked as he shook his head. 'I think that to dine with the duke one should be better dressed.'

It was Father Udo's turn to stagger.

'To dine with the duke?'

'Yes,' the abbot told him. 'He has invited you for to-night. Now let me see what you can wear.'

He stood for a moment, chin in palm, thinking. Then with a quick gesture he raised his hand.

'Ah, I have it,' he cried. 'One of my own that I've scarce worn because it is a trifle too large for my girth. I was going to have it cut down, but you shall wear it to-night, and you shall keep it.'

He hastened away, leaving Father Udo standing in a daze. The good father tried feebly to piece together the abbot's words and actions and make sense of them, but all that he could get was the hazy realisation that he was apparently to dine

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with the duke. Then just as Abbot Lorenzo's preoccupation with one problem had made him see the affair in its light, Father Udo's preoccupation with another caused him to look upon it in his own way.

Here was his sign!

The abbot came hurrying back, a costly cassock over his arm.

'Here, put this on,' he directed, as Father Udo stood wondering at the rich softness of the material, 'and let me see how it fits... There now... Stand back a little. Turn around. Why, it might have been made for you. You'll bring us no disgrace in that.'

Father Udo stood marveling at the unwonted luxury of raiment.

'I'm sorry about my own,' he murmured. 'Somehow with all my poor and things ——'

'Yes, you are so busy with charity that you make yourself seem almost a fitting object for it,' smiled the abbot.

'Consider the lilies of the field,' Father Udo reminded him. 'Here I am suddenly provided with all the glory of Solomon — at least with as much of it as is fitting for a priest.'

'And it's yours to keep,' the abbot reminded him. 'Now hasten to the castle, for it is growing late. And assure the duke of our loyalty.'

He pushed Father Udo out of the cell and into the corridor, walking arm in arm with him through the refectory and across the garden. As the priest passed through the gate into the road beyond, the abbot called after him.

'And about that sermon, father, preach on your martyr if you wish.'

Beaming, Father Udo plodded away toward the castle. Over the city roofs he could see it, perched upon its high rock like the eagle upon the arms of the duke. Ordinarily it seemed to him a brooding, sinister thing, with its frowning battlements, its turrets and its slits from which archers might discharge bolts that meant death. But to-day it took on a new aspect. It was an instrument of Heaven, through which had come his final encouragement. And as the sinking sun bathed its walls in pink light he almost thought that he could make out an angel standing upon the highest of its turrets, beckoning him on.

His elation held all the way across the town, but as he climbed, in the gathering dusk, up the steep road that led to the castle gate, it subsided. He had received his sign, but what was before him? Somehow his mind insisted upon turning upon a phrase uttered by a pagan prophetess of old, 'Beware of the Greeks bringing gifts.'

It was all foolishness of course. One shouldn't

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bother about the sayings of a pagan prophetess anyhow. If she had been a holy Christian woman there might be some sense in it; but Cassandra, why, even the Trojans hadn't paid any attention to her! Still, it would have been a lot better for them if they had. And the duke was not in the habit of inviting obscure priests to dine with him.

Thus battling within himself he passed through the castle yard to the timbered gate of the building, was admitted and ushered into an anteroom where he seated himself and waited for something further to happen. Beyond the heavy drapes that closed the doorway, he could hear the slow tread of a man at arms doing a purely formal bit of sentry duty. He knew that there was no meaning in the man's presence there, but he didn't like the sound. It was too suggestive of being under guard.

Then from the far end of the hall came lighter footsteps that did not falter till they reached the doorway, the portières were thrown back, and a tall, stoop-shouldered man entered.

His eyes sought out the priest and he smiled a tight-lipped smile.

'Is this Father Udo?' he asked.

The good father rose.

'The duke bade me come,' he replied.

The other advanced to the center of the room.

'He did indeed,' he said. 'His grace has heard of

your broad knowledge and would learn from you. We are to dine together, we three. Perhaps you know that I am Martin, his adviser.'

Father Udo nodded. The whole duchy knew of this soft-voiced, thin-faced man with the gimlet eyes, and many strange things were said of him.

'I fear that my learning has been exaggerated to his grace,' the priest returned. 'Count Gregorio, for instance, is better read in many things than I.'

Martin waved the count aside with a gesture of his lean hand.

'Learning is one thing,' he observed, 'and knowledge another. Beyond them is wisdom. If you have the last two, the duke will be satisfied. Come.'

He led the way down the hall. Father Udo followed him, pondering over the meaning of those words. Was there really something sinister about them or was he merely affected by Martin's reputation? And if it were the latter might not that reputation, in its turn, be founded upon the man's looks rather than on anything he had done? Father Udo almost wished that he had paid more attention to the gossip of the city, that he might know what people really said about the duke's adviser.

They turned into the dining-room, not the great banquet hall in which were held the functions of the castle but a smaller chamber where the duke might entertain more intimately the guests of his choice.

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The humble priest gasped as he looked about it. The heavy table in its center was a mass of carving, the paneled walls were hung with arms and with banners worked in gold thread. On a side table stood a wealth of silver dishes bearing the ducal crest. Altogether it made Father Udo feel quite out of place.

He and Martin had scarcely come in by one door when the duke entered by another. For a bare instant the host seemed to glower at his guest, then as though with the lifting of a cloud he broke into a smile wherein his white teeth gleamed.

'I have seen and heard of you, Father Udo,' he said, 'but occupation with the duties of my duchy has prevented my being your host till to-night. Martin, pull out a chair for the good father. His charity is renowned throughout Colenna and, as I said to you just this afternoon, his knowledge makes him one of my most valued subjects.'

Martin did as he was bidden and they seated themselves, the duke at the head of the table, his adviser at its foot, Father Udo between them. And all began very peacefully.

The wine was excellent and the antipasto marvelous. The capon made Father Udo pity the abbot who dined on similar but far less perfectly prepared fowl in the refectory of the abbey. Then another dish was brought, and at sight of it the priest was

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so certain of Heaven's purpose that he looked eagerly at the servant who had borne it in, as though expecting to recognize in him Gabriel or Michael or some other messenger from above.

It was squid, deep fried.

CHAPTER V

IF the duke's viands were a delight to the sensitive and not over-indulged palate of Father Udo, his wines were no less so. The only thing that troubled the good priest was his host's prodigality in serving them. The array of vintages set out was overwhelming to a man who was accustomed to but a single sort at a meal, and while he felt that it would be impolite to refuse any of them he feared for his ability to compass them all.

In addition to the rare sorts there was a goblet of common wine always full at his elbow. He could scarcely drink a drop from it before that drop would be replaced by a watchful servant with a carafe, and it troubled him, for while he didn't like to leave it sitting there full his efforts to empty it were as futile as would have been an attempt to bail out the Mediterranean with a thimble.

At Count Gregorio's he was in the habit of turning his goblet down as a sign that he wished no more. The count and his steward understood and respected this sign — in fact the thoughtful steward provided a little empty plate to facilitate it. But the duke knew nothing of it, and besides, if he couldn't get the accursed goblet empty, he couldn't possibly turn it down.

After a while he ceased trying. Why worry about

such little things when the world was such a pleasurable place to live in? He felt a most pleasing sense of detachment, for his conscious mind had somehow become separated from his subconscious, so that he was able to pursue his own thoughts without losing his place in the conversation at the table.

At about the time when the squid was served, there had recurred to him the idea that behind Heaven's repeated signals to go on with his creation of Saint Udo the Martyr must be some better reason than just his own convenience and his distaste for the other two Udos. And as delicacy followed delicacy till the meal was ended and only the goblets remained on the table his conviction of this grew.

Had the meal not filled him with such comfort, he would have been uneasy about it. He was too well acquainted with his Bible to miss the fact that the tasks which Heaven picks out for a man are likely to be quite difficult, dangerous even. Look what happened to all the holy martyrs, Paul beheaded and Peter crucified, so the story went, head downward.

But that was not so bad as what might have happened. A real soldier considered it worse to fail in his duty than to be killed, and it was so easy to fail when the alternative was death or even prison.

That was where the real danger lay. Not every one could expect the lenient treatment accorded Jonah, who received enlightenment and another chance through the medium of a whale. So, thought Father Udo, it would be well to recognize his task when it should come along and meet all its demands.

What was the duke saying? He must not lose track of the conversation. That would be worse than impolite. It would be ingratitude, for a fine dinner and for the way out of a serious difficulty.

'I suppose,' his grace observed, 'that you hear a great many startling things in the confessional.'

Father Udo felt Martin's eyes upon him. They had been bothering him for some time. Again and again he had tried, oh so casually, to surprise them in their stare, but they always eluded him. Martin would be leaning forward, elbows on the table, toying with his goblet and looking at the duke or at anything but the priest. Then when Father Udo would look away he would feel the gimlet-like scrutiny resumed.

Perhaps it was this that made him wary. Perhaps it was the point which he had reached in his meditations. Possibly it was his abhorrence of anything that remotely suggested a desire to gossip about the secrets of the confessional. At any rate

he decided that he had better muster his faculties, and very reluctantly he dragged his two personalities together. It was slow work, and it seemed a shame to cast off that pleasurable lassitude which had enveloped him, but he felt that he must not let his mental forces become too scattered.

‘Yes, your grace, we hear much,’ he replied. ‘And you’d be surprised how much of it we forget, too.’

That, he felt, would be sufficient to discourage further idle talk about a sacrament which should not be discussed except in the abstract. The time to do such things was before discussion got well under way. Then it could be done gracefully. Later on it might be necessary to be rude, and rudeness, being a sort of unkindness, was something to be avoided.

But the duke would not be discouraged.

‘There spoke the priest,’ he laughed. ‘But as a man of the world tell me, don’t you come across some choice morsels now and then?’

Father Udo was becoming very distressed. He did not like to cross a man who was both his host and his ruler, but the Church prescribed absolute secrecy about the sins which people confessed to him, and here was one point where priests, however lax they might be in other respects, rarely faltered. Moreover, it went deeper with him than

even a command of the Church. It was a point of honor.

'The man of the world does not enter the confessional, your grace,' he reminded his questioner.

Then smiling whimsically he went on, 'And I am afraid that I couldn't speak as such anyhow. If I were to try the world would laugh at me. You see, I'm not built for it.'

Again he had turned the subject without being impolite. Again he found himself returned to it, more insistently than ever.

'Suppose you should be ordered to tell what you know about a certain person?' the duke inquired, and there was irritation in his voice.

Father Udo's heart missed a beat. Was this a threat? Had the duke's face become visibly darker as he spoke? In the city it was said that when the duke grew angry he 'turned black.' Now Father Udo knew what it meant — not black but just darker, as though a cloud had come up in his countenance. He must be angry now. And they said that he could hold his anger only so long.

But how avert it?

'Oh, I see what you have in mind!' cried the harassed priest. 'You wish to be shriven for something and you doubt my discretion. I assure you, your grace, that you may confess to me freely. If I would protect with my life the secrets of the mean-

est beggar on the streets how much more would I do for those of my duke? The Emperor himself could not wring them from me.'

The duke gasped with impatience, but a bit of the darkness faded from his brow.

'No, no,' he declared, 'you mistake me. I always confess to my own chaplain. I, er —'

He was looking at Martin, silently urging him to speak. And the adviser took up the burden of the conversation, softly, smoothly, as was his wont; addressing his words to his master.

'I believe that the Church is quite practical in this matter, your grace. Who would be willing to confess if he knew that by doing so he might well be shouting his sins from the roof tops? To break the secrecy of the confessional — unless discreetly, of course, and for sufficient reason — would be to endanger the sacrament itself. Is that not so, Father Udo?'

Well spoken. A trap well laid. But those words about discretion and sufficient reason stood out of the speech like a rock at low tide. Perhaps Martin's voice had become unduly insinuating when he made the qualification. At any rate there was no mistaking it.

'The Church recognizes no sufficient reason,' Father Udo objected. 'No exceptions are permitted us.'

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'Oh, well,' murmured Martin, with an easy gesture, 'they couldn't be, officially. What I mean is that — well, suppose it were possible to tell something in confidence to an injured party who might trace it down by other means once the guilty persons were identified, what then? It wouldn't be necessary to give facts. Just a hint would do. And if there were enough incentive, money for charity and so on, would not the good of it outweigh the harm?'

He paused, then hastened to continue, 'Of course you understand that I am speaking pure theory, just for the purpose of discussion.'

Glancing from the casual Martin to the duke, Father Udo saw that the latter leaned eagerly forward, waiting to catch his reply. And being, for all his simplicity, not an entire fool, he was not in the least taken in by Martin's cover-up phrase. The duke was not interested in his learning or his charity, nor was he interested in academic questions about abstract points of religion. He wanted to know something that the priest had heard, or might have heard, in the confessional!

Could it be about the duchess? Father Udo knew of nothing else that it might be. And at the thought of the terribly dangerous knowledge of her life which he possessed his blood ran cold.

Then it ran hot. He was in for it. All right, he

would show them that he couldn't be intimidated. He would tell them a thing or two. And he would do it right now, before they should get down to concrete cases.

'I am glad that you are speaking only theory,' he said firmly, 'for I could not but have a very poor opinion of a man who would try to wheedle a priest into betraying something which he has heard in sacred confidence. Apart from the sacrament there is the question of a sense of honor and of — well, for want of a better word let us call it sportsmanship.'

He heard the duke grunt and stir in his chair, but Martin remained serene.

'Of course, of course,' he purred, changing the subject himself. 'Your point of view is worthy of your good patron saint, Udo the Austere. There was a true saint for you, an implacable foe of immorality. He knew how to visit a sin with quick punishment.'

Father Udo smiled faintly. His judgment had been sound. Martin was approaching the subject from a different angle, having only appeared to change it.

'Udo the Austere is not my patron saint,' he corrected. 'I get my inspiration from Udo the Martyr.'

'Udo the Martyr?'

'Yes, you'll remember him as the one who said,

“I do not care about the sin, which has already been committed and is beyond my reach. Its punishment belongs to God. What I must do is save the sinner.””

‘Somehow I don’t recall him,’ Martin observed.

‘Nor I,’ growled the duke.

‘Perhaps not,’ remarked Father Udo. ‘You are so busy with the things of the duchy. I should be surprised indeed if you knew of him. But he was quite to my liking, an apostle of forgiveness, and I am sure that your grace would not suffer by learning of him. I should be glad to instruct you.’

‘I want to know nothing of him!’ cried the duke, springing to his feet. ‘And I for one have no intention of trying to wheedle secrets out of any priest. I don’t have to wheedle! I am ruler in Colenna and ——’

‘No, no, your grace. Pardon, pardon, your grace.’

It was Martin who spoke thus, having sprung to his feet at the same time as the duke, but more lightly and quickly. He passed along behind the priest and confronted his master, who had laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

‘Your grace,’ he went on, ‘this wine has gone to all our heads. We invite a very learned priest to dine with us and then we let things which do not really concern us carry us away till discussion be-

comes argument. Let us bid Father Udo good night before we spoil a very pleasant evening.'

The duke glowered at him, stood for a moment as though about to draw his weapon, then let his hand drop.

'Good night, Father Udo,' he grunted.

Martin faced about.

'Good night, Father,' he bowed. 'The steward will show you out. We hope to have the pleasure of another chat with you before long.'

He rang a bell and the steward came. Then when their guest, breathing thanks to the powers above for this rescue, had returned their good nights and disappeared down the hall behind his guide, Martin turned back to the duke.

'Not so hasty, your grace,' he cautioned. 'You are not storming a castle now.'

'Why did you stop me?' fumed the other. 'In another minute I'd have had it out of him or slit his throat.'

Martin shrugged.

'He isn't ready to tell,' he remarked.

'Then ——'

'Then you'd have slit his throat, and he'd never be ready to tell. Is that any way to find out what you want to know?'

'I'd have made him wish ——'

'You're not interested in his wishes, your grace.'

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There is an old saying that dead men tell no tales. So this good father must not be allowed to die for a while.'

'But what good is he to me alive?' asked the duke. 'He won't say anything. He practically told us that.'

'Practically?' Martin queried. 'Well, perhaps. Your grace, the human mind is a strange thing. It does not grasp new ideas quickly, and it is even more loth to give up old. This priest has lived long with the thought that the secrecy of the confessional is sacred. He must have time to change. Besides, he may not know anything.'

The duke shook his head.

'I am convinced that he does,' he snapped. 'And I am going to have it out of him.'

'Good!' smiled Martin. 'But you mustn't think that it will come out of a sword hole.'



CHAPTER VI

THEY changed the castle guard at midnight. Julia, lying wide awake upon her bed, could hear the approaching tramp, tramp, of the relief crossing the flagged courtyard, the clear challenge of the sentry, the corporal's command to halt. Then came the shock of pike butts on the pavement, murmured directions, sharp orders. Once more the tramp of feet, this time growing fainter. Another challenge, far off. Tiny noises. Silence.

The night guard was business-like. So long as the castle was awake its sentries might be more or less in the nature of ornaments. But when its lights had one by one been extinguished and its walls were dead black beneath the starlit sky another and more serious group of men took their places. Sleeping greatness must be well guarded, for assassins might be hired cheaply in Colenna.

Julia smiled.

Yes, she reflected, assassins might indeed be hired cheaply.

This had been a great day for her. It had begun badly enough, for had she not seen Francesco riding with that Bianca? But after that ——

She could take all the credit for what had happened then. Had it not been she who prompted the summoning of Father Udo, planting the seed of

suspicion in her father's heart? And that the priest had indeed been sent for showed that the seed was growing. Oh, she hoped that it would bear flaming flowers, that one day not too far distant she might have the pleasure of seeing the duchess stoned in the square! And perhaps, if they would let her, throw a stone herself.

Midnight and more. The relief was gone now. It was quiet as death down there in the yard. Quiet as death.

She would not be plagued much longer with the duchess. Her father's jealousy was aroused. No further need of goading him. She knew his nature so well. Unless something unforeseen should come up, he would go on from fierce to fiercer mood till—well, if there were anything to find out he would find it.

And in working upon him she had convinced herself that there was indeed something.

But one thing which he planned he would not do. He would not replace one hateful woman with another even worse. He would not bring that Bianca Baldini home to play the grand lady over her. That was all provided against.

Nor would Francesco go riding again with the shameless creature.

Yes, it had been a great day.

Assassins might be hired cheaply—very cheaply

when they were mercenaries anxious to desert.

Suppose one's father sent one to the chapel to pray. All that interested him was getting one out of his way. He would not know if one went to seek a certain notorious character, whom he himself had sought out on occasion — a fellow who knew where to find men who would kill for a price.

And this person had produced just the sort that she wanted, three careless cutthroats who were in the army and regretted it, who chafed at discipline and were eager to set themselves up in business somewhere beyond the Alps — their business to be the waylaying of travelers on lonely highways.

What they wanted most was horses, good horses that would take them out of the duchy ahead of all pursuit and serve them in a like manner when they had begun plying their new trade. Oh, money too, but horses first of all, for once they were out on the road the money would come easily enough.

Well, the castle stables were full of horses, and three of the best would be missing in the morning.

There was a clump of trees, a sort of park, near the Castle Baldini. So easy for three men, or thirty-three, to ride in there and wait, hidden from sight. And some little time after sun-up Bianca was wont to ride forth from her gate. At the right moment the deserters would spur out, one cutting off retreat, the other two doing the work.

Would they use swords or daggers? Julia's thin hand stole under the pillow to clutch the jeweled hilt whose cold hardness greeted her fingers. Oh, to use it herself! To plunge it into the bosom of that upstart!

Her breath came hard and hot.

But a woman couldn't do those things. Not in the open. Not when her father cast covetous eyes upon the hated one.

And the mercenaries were surer. Three of them to do the deed and carry all knowledge of her complicity away with them.

But would the destruction of Bianca affect that of the duchess? Well, even if it did the die was cast. But it was not likely to. The duke's infatuations were fleeting, his jealousies long lived and terrible.

Perhaps his rage over Bianca's murder would feed anew the fires of his anger at the duchess. You could never tell about that sort of thing. But something might be found, some plausible liar paid, to connect the duchess with the killing. A disputed lover or something. But not the duke! The cause couldn't have anything to do with his momentary desire for Bianca. That would make the duchess seem to care too much for him.

He had certainly followed up the suggestion about sending for Father Udo with alacrity. Julia

wondered what he had found out. Probably nothing as yet. The priest was a simple old fellow but he had definite ideas as to his duty. He would not easily surrender secrets confided to him under the seal of confession.

She hoped that he would not be too stubborn, that he would not compel them to be too harsh with him. He meant well enough, and those Egyptian perfumes which he brought her were exquisite. All that they cost her was a few coins for charity, and there was nothing to compare with them in all of Colenna.

Yes, she hoped that he would not try too hard to hold to the secret. But if he did — her father knew how to wring such things from people. The donjon was strong. Its walls were thick.

Once the duke had suspected a conspiracy. Certain men had been arrested and dragged to the castle. And Julia, passing near the keep had heard cries coming from its depths, horrible cries which even the mass of masonry could not hold in.

Her father had found out what he wanted to know.

And he would get this other secret, if secret there was. If he should become sufficiently aroused, it might not even matter whether there was one or not.

So the duchess would be removed from her life.

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And Bianca!

A rooster crowed somewhere out there. No, it was not yet dawn, but dawn was coming. Then morning. And noon would bring tidings, excited people riding in from across the valley to demand that the duke find and punish the guilty persons.

And the duke would try. He would send after three men and would probably not catch them. Moreover they would have nothing to gain by informing on his daughter. For they could always hope for her secret aid if they remained silent.

Oh, it was all fixed.

She turned over on her pillow. They said that sleep was delicious, but sleeplessness could sometimes be more so.



CHAPTER VII

WHEN day was no more than a red promise
in the east and the dawn light lay smooth
and still upon the land, Francesco, of the dogs and
horses, guided his black stallion through the de-
serted streets of Colenna. The footfalls of his
mount echoed roundly from the walls that lined
the narrow, winding way. Clop, clop, clop, clop.
Sounds seemed so much louder in the dawn —
greater even than at night, perhaps because the
senses were more alive.

He rounded a sharp bend in the road and the
great city gate, where lounged sleepy sentries wait-
ing the morning relief, loomed up before him. At
sight of the cavalier the gate-keepers swung the
huge portals open, for these were not mercenaries
but Colennese and every one in town knew Fran-
cesco. They had seen him pass each morning in
the gray light, too, and sometimes exchanged
comments, *sotto voce*, upon him.

‘They say he is the best swordsman in Italy.’

‘Well, if the rest of his sword compares with its
hilt it were a shame not to use it well.’

‘And look at that horse. What would you not
give for such a one?’

‘I’d fear lest I couldn’t handle it. But I’d take

the dog. Such ears as he has, that stand up stiff as pikes when he listens.'

'But the horse!'

'Nay, give me the dog.'

For Graf, Francesco's favorite dog, a shepherd given him, when it was but a puppy, by a captain from Strassburg, always went along on these jaunts, following close at heel in the city but racing alongside when the gate was passed and the open road lay before them. And as they approached the post of the guard he would break into a whine, as though pleading with his master not to spend too much time talking with the officer in charge.

This morning Graf's petition must have been well received, for with a smile 'Good morning,' Francesco passed along. Once beyond the gate he touched the horse's flanks with his spurs and they were off.

Francesco never felt so thoroughly alive as when he was in the saddle. There was something elemental about swinging along in unison with his mount, a sense of oneness with the horse that made him feel as though the great muscles of the stallion were his own. The creak of leather and the pounding of hoofs roused him like a bugle call. To his quickened senses the morning air seemed sweeter, the hillsides more beautiful, as he rode thus away

in the dawn, and there stirred within him half-thoughts of great deeds and great adventures and great loves.

Time was when he had taken a different road each morning, down along the bay or up the slope to that great ledge where hill towns clung precariously, or into the pass, off to the north through which the armies of Spain and of France had time and again poured like glittering torrents, rushing to glory or disaster with the light of the sun upon the points of their lances. But now he always started in the same direction — across the valley and between vineyards to the hill where stood the peaceful Castle Baldini.

He liked to reach there just as the sun slid its first rays along the walls, and as he passed he would gaze up wondering which might be the window behind whose half-drawn curtains the lady of the castle stirred languorously as the light fell upon her cheek.

Bianca the boyish! At that hour she was still a woman, stretching white arms in her awakening, the soft brown luxury of her hair half veiling her curving lips and dreaming eyes. Oh, she might be a dashing horsewoman, surer in the saddle and more daring at fence or ditch than any man in the duchy — she might be that when the sun was higher in the heavens; and when the moon was silvering the

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valley she might be a beauty aloof, like the moon itself, inspiring sigh and serenade from the most gallant of the nobles about. But in the golden glory of sunrise, when shadows were long on the dewy grass and mists still clung to the hills in slender streaks, she meant most to him.

Then the rest of the world was sunk in slumber and he alone paused beside her castle wall with heart a-thrill. And he had a dream of her, a dream that had somehow grown more real since their chance meeting of yesterday. For dreams do sometimes come true.

To have her always with him on these early mornings when the whole world was a-tingle with the awakening of life! Or better still, to go riding off, the two together, over the purple hills and on up through the heart of the glistening mountains to adventure in a land beyond; to go to the end of this road and on to the end of the next, till they should reach the end of the last road of all and gaze from the crest of some blue ridge into a great unknown that beckoned compellingly.

To go with her along great highways and little byways, here a lane, there the *route royale*, the king's highway of the French! The king's highway! There was something stirring in the thought of it, something suggestive of song.

Perhaps one day he would sing such a song to

Bianca. He was in a way a troubadour. Let's see —

Then it's saddles for two in the morning,
We'll early be up and away.
For I'm coming for you in the morning —

But the white sunlight was flooding about him and Graf was reproaching him with a glance for this tarrying about the roadside. Sunrise was over, and dreaming time. How could he ever mean anything to Bianca Baldini, who might choose from the whole world? What had he to offer her? The Baldini estates were next in extent to those of the duke and compared with hers he had but a sorry fortune. His love he could give her, and the service of the sword that hung by his side. Shaking his head he lifted his rein and cantered off.

It did not occur to him that the things which he had to offer her might be all that she should need, that to the joyful as to the wise the material things of life are its least important things, that one who has always had goods a-plenty would be foolish indeed to waste a thought on more goods.

Now he was ready to give rein to the stallion, to go from a canter to a stirring run along the road that stretched away level to the feet of the sun-tinted hills. A single curve and the castle should be blotted out behind him. He turned for a last look at it, gleaming there more château than castle

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— for though the words may mean the same thing there is a smile in one and a frown in the other — just a glance over his shoulder before he should pull himself from his dream.

Then, instead of breaking into the run in whose anticipation his mount was already straightening and his dog barking and bounding about, he reined in. For he was curious as to who might be the three other cavaliers abroad at such an early hour.

They had just come over the brow of the hill and had drawn rein beneath the castle wall. For a moment jealousy flamed up in him as he saw them pause at almost the very spot where he was wont to dream his dreams, then he laughed at his folly. Lovers do not usually travel in threes. Nor had these horsemen the air of men who might pay court to Bianca. At such a distance he could not be certain, but they looked like some of the duke's mercenaries from Hesse.

One of them pointed and they cantered off to disappear in a clump of trees across the road from the castle gate. Francesco waited to see them emerge, but they did not appear. He knitted his brows, What could they be doing in that little grove? Oh, well, curiosity was a woman's privilege, not a man's, and his dog's impatient whine was changing to one of disappointment.

He struck spur, and the stallion bounded off.

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Thudding hoofs beneath him. The wind coursing by his cheek. The horse straining every muscle in its powerful answer to his demand for speed, and he himself responding, his body in perfect rhythm with that of his mount. This was life stripped down to the beauty of pure feeling, life that took account only of the glorious moment.

Back there in the grove three men with Julia's gold in their purses kept watch on the gate of Castle Baldini.

CHAPTER VIII

A MILE, two miles, Francesco raced, with his dog tearing along beside him. Then, with the stallion panting and flecked with foam, he reined in. It would be well to go along for a while at a walk, for although the horse did not tire easily they had been hitting a very hard pace.

His thoughts went back to Bianca. If he but had her beside him, her face radiant, her eyes snapping with the fire of her youth!

But why had those men hidden themselves in the little park opposite her gate? He smiled at his foolish questioning. Doubtless they were there no longer but were somewhere on the road behind him.

He guided his horse to the brow of a little eminence hard by and scanned the white stretch over which he had come. A farmer's cart had turned into it back there a few hundred yards. Beyond he could see a boy driving a small flock of sheep; he remembered that they had been coming down a lane as he went coursing by. But the specks that should have been horsemen were nowhere in sight.

He had intended to go on to Corezia this morning, then back over the upper road, which followed, so they said, the route taken by Hannibal, the Carthaginian in that great adventure of his against

Rome. There was inspiration in swinging along that high valley where the African genius had gone to fling himself into the heart of a hostile country and, out-numbered and cut off from his own people, had made the mistress of the earth tremble.

Oh, of course, it was better that Hannibal had lost, that Europe should rule instead of Africa, but somehow the most appealing heroes were those of lost causes, this Carthaginian and Pontius the Samnite and the rest of those who fixed their eyes upon a star and followed it till at its sinking it left them staring at an empty horizon, smiling, overcome but unvanquished.

But now, as he sat on his motionless horse upon the hill, looking in vain for those other three riders, he decided to let Hannibal's road go for to-day and retrace his steps. He tried to think of some excuse for this. The trip around was long and it might storm — there was scarcely a cloud in all the sky. He really wanted to try the gait of the new mare in the stable at home — then why hadn't he come on her instead of the stallion? His mount had a little jerk that threatened lameness — was this why he urged him to such speed as he started back?

No, he could not deceive himself about it. He was going back because he was uneasy about Bianca. Let him laugh at himself later, when he

should round the corner of the wall and see before the gate of his lady's castle only peace and quiet and the green columns of poplars standing placidly in the sunlight. Let him call himself a silly fool then, when he should know that he was indeed one. But till then — what the devil? If it pleased him to fear for her, need he be ashamed of it?

Back down the road he coursed, bending low over the stallion's neck, holding the reins short and tight, giving his mount the spur at the slightest easing off of pace.

'On, Midnight, on! Time enough later to rest.'

And though *Midnight* plunged ahead like an arrow, so that the distant castle seemed visibly to grow as they neared it, still this was not enough for *Francesco*. Not till he should thunder around that curve and see the gate and the grove, satisfying himself that all was well, would he consider even the speed of a meteor more than a snail's pace.

At last the corner, and he leaned slightly inward as *Midnight*'s hoofs beat furiously around it. Ready to relax when a view of the stretch ahead should reassure him, he only struck spur more fiercely as he saw what was there. And his sword came leaping from the scabbard, while his voice framed a mad cry.

'Ride, *Bianca*! Ride for your life!'

For there she was, cantering toward him on her

fawn-colored mare, unaware that behind her, separating her from the gate, the three strangers had just plunged from the grove.

Bianca looked wonderingly at him, then glanced over her shoulder as the horses of her pursuers cleared the roadside ditch and beat hurrying hoofs upon the hard way. Francesco saw her strike spur, saw her mount spring ahead, startled. He saw, too, those others urge their horses on; one, better mounted than his comrades, leaving the other two behind as he streaked along in pursuit.

There was no doubting their purpose. Their swords were out. They meant business — foul business.

Strange that in the excitement of the moment Francesco should see those men more clearly than he had in the calm of an earlier hour. It was as though the realization of what they meant smashed through to his innermost spirit and left there a picture to be grasped on an instant.

Three ruffians in sallet and leather jacket — he had never seen them before. Three horses, a roan and a bay and a black, far more distinguished than their riders. He knew them! Yes, and he knew the stables from which they came.

That roan gelding. Too well did he know its speed. In a race it was almost the equal of Midnight, superior to Bianca's mount. And if it should

slip by him — Midnight was tired now and the gelding was fresh.

Bianca passed him, riding like the wind. She could outdistance those other two with their heavy riders. The roan must be stopped. And he dared not trust a single sword slash to do it.

Here it came, its beetle-browed, mustachioed rider leaning forward, low to its neck. Ten paces — five —

Bracing himself in his stirrups Francesco pulled Midnight over. Too late the ruffian, who had planned to parry and slip by, pulled on his own rein. His weapon clashed upon Francesco's as the horses plunged together, then he and his mount went down before the weight of the stallion.

But even as the horse rolled over in the roadway and the rider, thrown clear, somersaulted into the ditch, the stallion stumbled and went to its knees, throwing Francesco over its neck. And as the young man scrambled to his feet the other two were upon him.

It was the ditch that saved him, for he threw himself sidewise into it, landing there on his hands and knees, still clutching his sword. By instinct the horses went over and Francesco had time to collect his scattered senses for what was to come.

Springing to the road, he faced the enemy as they wheeled and charged. The man on the black, a red-

bearded, red-eyed scoundrel, came first, with the other right behind. They were so close together that Francesco dared not engage them but dodged out of the way of the oncoming black, flinging his body low to avoid a slash that for all his nimbleness narrowly missed him.

Again he plunged into the ditch, as the bay appeared almost above him, landing on the motionless figure of the man whom his first charge had stunned. And as he felt that form beneath him he realized that, whatever might happen to him, he had none the less won the fight. Bianca was safe.

Bianca was safe! They had tried to kill her, damn them! And here was he jumping into ditches to save his skin from a couple of cutthroats who preyed on women!

With the anger flaring red before his eyes, he leaped up, gripping his sword, ready to meet the next attack with a little deadly work of his own. They played with death. All right, he would teach them what death really was.

He was in the field now and the bay was bearing down on him. Splendid! Come on. With the black well behind, he'd have time for a thrust.

A lean fellow with a long, shaven face and many teeth. Here's steel for you, and a quick road to hell.

Francesco thrust hard, driving his point beneath the other's blade and up for his middle. But the

man was no infant with the sword. A movement of the wrist, a swing away in the saddle, and all he got was a scratch. Then, bringing his horse sharply around, he kept Francesco's blade in engagement.

Too late did Francesco realize the folly of having risked all on a single thrust. The black would be on him in an instant, yet he dared not turn from this antagonist to meet the one charging in.

Desperately he tried to penetrate the other's guard. His point zipped past the hilt and caught the fellow in the forearm, but the other ignored the wound and thrust back.

Here came the black! Out of the corner of his eye he could see its foam-flecked chest. He could almost feel its breath.

'Well,' thought he, for amid battles and campaigns he had often wondered just where death would overtake him, 'here it is.'

A snarling roar. A startled whinny. A curse from the oncoming foe. Graf had entered the lists.

The dog had been slow to realize that his master was not playing a game, but now he sprang forward like a streak, a fury of bristling hair and bared teeth. His jaws gripped the nostrils of the oncoming horse, tearing away, stopping it almost in its tracks.

Despite kicking hoofs and the ineffectual sword-strokes of the rider, who was compelled to cut by

the head of his mount, the dog held on. For a moment it was one against one, and a moment was all that Francesco, the swordsman, needed.

'Here it is!' he cried. And it was a cry of exultation.

A feint. A lunge. Once the rider parried. Then Francesco's sharp blade drove under his heavier weapon and home into his body. With a grunt the fellow slid down the opposite side of his horse to land in a heap on the brown grass.

Francesco rushed to the aid of his dog.

Graf was still clinging to the nostrils of the horse. The tortured beast reared and backed away, shaking its head in a vain attempt to be rid of him. Leaning far forward the rider thrust viciously.

Too late to prevent the stroke, Francesco saw the steel slide into the dog's side beneath the foreleg. Then, with an angry slash, he brought the keen edge of his own blade down across the assassin's wrist.

With a yell the fellow dropped his weapon. As it clanged to the ground his horse, shaking off the wounded Graf, turned and bolted toward the city, with the rider swaying dangerously on his back, holding to his all-but-severed wrist while the abandoned rein swung loose.

Francesco gave the disappearing man but a single glance, then sprang to where Graf lay. Bend-

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ing over him, he examined the gash in his side. It was deep, but perhaps not too deep.

'Poor old Graf,' he murmured. 'Good old Graf.'

The dog gazed up with tender eyes, with eyes that said not 'Pity me' but 'Master, I love you.' He licked Francesco's hand.

In the ditch the first of the assassins stirred. Painfully he crawled forth. Looking about him, as he dragged himself to his feet, he beheld three horses with empty saddles standing motionless. In the field lay one of his comrades, holding his belly and groaning. The other was nowhere in sight, but over there with his back turned was the meddler who had spoiled their game, bending over a dog.

A curse on the meddler! But for him the three would now be on their way toward the Alps, rich in pocket, with army restraint cast off and a career on the highroad awaiting them. A curse on him!

He seemed very much absorbed in that dog. Perhaps if one were quiet about it —

The ruffian drew his dagger and, rubbing his sleeve across his eyes to clear his vision, began working his way slowly toward the unwitting Francesco. It was hard work, with the world spinning and rocking about him, but with patience born of a desire for revenge he went on.

He measured the distance between him and his

prey. A dozen steps now. If only his luck should hold —

For a moment it seemed that his luck would not hold. The young man straightened up, made as if to turn about, then stooped again to pat the dog's head..

'You'll be all right, old fellow,' he murmured.

Drawing a relieved breath the assassin resumed his stealthy progress. He knew now how hard he had been hit. Great flashes before his eyes. In his ears a clattering like the clatter of hoofs. But he had strength for a blow, and one blow just between those broad shoulders would be enough.

One step more. He raised his arm.

Then the clattering grew to a roar. Something struck him like a battering ram and sent him spinning into the ditch from which he had just dragged himself. And as he plunged headlong he realized that the strange sounds in his head had risen to the pitch of a woman's scream, then died out.

Francesco, too, heard that scream and sprang to his feet in time to see the ruffian fall. Bianca was reining in the horse with which she had ridden him down.

Very white of face was she as she spoke.

'He was going to stab you in the back.'

Down the road a strange group was running

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toward them, half a dozen peasants with scythes and axes, two buxom women, their hair streaming wildly as one brandished a sickle and the other a pitchfork, even a boy with a slingshot.

Francesco looked at them, then at her.

‘You went for help?’ he asked.

‘Of course. But I was afraid it would come too late.’

He smiled.

‘It would have,’ he said, ‘but you yourself were in time.’

The color returned to her cheeks at that.

‘Are you hurt?’ she inquired.

‘Not a scratch.’

Then he saw that there was blood upon his sword arm. His sleeve was torn, too, and beneath was a long gash in the flesh.

Bianca saw it, and went white again. But Francesco laughed reassuringly.

‘I guess I didn’t tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘but really I don’t remember having got it.’

At some time during the fight some one’s sword must have reached him. But he would never know whose or when.

Bianca swung out of her saddle. She came over to him and with a foolish little handkerchief she tried to stanch the flow of blood, which was not great for all that the wound was long.

'I'm so sorry you were hurt for me,' she murmured.

Hurt? A scratch, yes, but the look of concern in her eyes and the touch of her finger tips paid for it a hundred times over.

'It's nothing,' he assured her. 'I don't even feel it.'

The peasants came puffing up. Their voices rose in a babel of sound.

'Where are they?'

'Here's one. Ah, he's well laid out.'

'But there were three.'

'Look. Here's one. In the ditch.'

'Here. Here in the ditch.'

'See. He's moving.' It was the boy who shrilled this.

'Kill him!' cried a bristly-bearded scythe-bearer, standing in his tracks and making no move to do that to which he exhorted all. 'He would have murdered our lady Bianca!'

'Kill him!' echoed the others, brandishing their weapons.

But when it came to striking they were as slow as he.

All but the woman with the pitchfork. She was last to arrive upon the scene and with a scornful glance at the others, who stood there shouting so wildly and doing so little, she elbowed her way between two axe-bearers.

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‘Make way, big-mouthed ones,’ she grunted.
‘I’ll spit him fair enough.’

And spit him she would have if Francesco had not broken through the circle and grasped her by the arm.

‘Don’t!’ he ordered.

The amazon, big-boned and brown, looked sullenly at him out of her wide set eyes. Within her the habit of obedience was fighting with the impulse to kill.

‘Why not?’ she demanded, as she strove to shake off the restraining hand.

The peasants took up the cry.

‘Yes, why not? Why not?’

Francesco let his level gaze run around the circle, and as he looked at each that one fell silent. Then, turning again to the woman, he gestured at the cutthroat, who had risen to his knees and was extending his hands in supplication.

‘I’ll own that the world would be better off without him,’ he said. ‘But there is a good reason for sparing his life.’

‘What reason?’ she glowered.

Bianca now came forward through the group of peasants, who made respectful way for her. Standing at Francesco’s side, she addressed the woman in a voice loud enough for all to hear.

‘That my rescuer does not wish it is reason

enough, Giuseppina. And I do not wish it. Surely my kind people would not go against my wishes.'

Giuseppina shrugged and drew back. She might be unconvinced, but since it was her mistress who spoke she had no choice but to obey.

Tearfully the battered ruffian offered thanks, but Francesco cut him short.

'Get up!' he commanded. 'And get your friend back to town.'

Very stiffly and haltingly the other rose. He crossed to where his wounded comrade lay.

'Poor Fritz!' he exclaimed, as he stooped over him. 'He's in a bad way. I'm afraid you've done for him.'

'Consider yourself lucky not to be in his boots,' Francesco retorted.

He bade the peasants bring up the men's horses. Upon one they loaded the wounded man, supporting him there till his comrade could mount the roan, bring it alongside and grasp him by the shoulder. Then they stood back and the beaten men rode slowly off toward town.

'Now let's tend to Graf,' said Francesco.

Bianca turned to the peasants who stood in a close knot scowling after the disappearing assassins.

'Carry the poor dog into the castle yard,' she directed.

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The stubborn Giuseppina was first to step forward. She plodded over to Graf, but when he saw her approaching he rose to his feet and made warily away. He had no intention of being carried, and avoiding one well-meaning peasant after another he circled around to join his master and Bianca, who decided to let him have his own way and follow them as they led their horses through the gate.

When they had left the peasants behind, Bianca turned to Francesco and sighed.

'You are very merciful,' she told him. 'That man would have stabbed you in the back, yet you protected him.'

'There was a very good reason,' he nodded.

'Yes,' she replied. 'I heard you say so. But what was it? And why didn't you turn them over to justice?'

'I'm afraid that justice would have been more than a little lenient with them,' he declared.

'Why? Who are they?'

He shrugged.

'Oh, nobody,' he answered. 'I've never seen them before. But I know their horses. They come from the duke's stables.'



CHAPTER IX

FATHER UDO was expecting a woman caller. Just who she might be he did not know, but he could tell a great deal about her. She was a young woman of good, though not of noble, birth, and quite comely. And she would come from the castle of the duke. That is, she would probably come, though of course it was impossible to be sure.

Neither astrology nor necromancy was responsible for these deductions, for he held those sciences in as much scorn as was possible for a person of his humility. He held to a surer science — that of human nature. And that knowledge of people which his experience had given him, coupled with an incident in the confessional that morning, told him that he would not have to wait long for the lady.

He sat in the very seat where Count Gregorio had found him when he had come with the manuscripts, prepared to receive her with kindness, for she needed it. And as he waited his mind went back to the confessional and to what he had heard there.

The voice of a heartbroken woman coming to him from the blackness beyond the little grating within which he sat relieving souls of their burdens of sorrow and sin. In half sobs she poured forth her

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story of violence at the hands of the duke, adding to it bits of information as to the ruler's intentions toward his duchess and his hopes with regard to Bianca Baldini. These things she had learned, she said, when weak with the handling of the cruel Julia she lay in seeming swoon upon the floor of her mistress's room.

For her misfortune Father Udo had given her the comfort of kindly understanding and soothing speech. She was not to blame. She must not accuse herself for what the duke had done. And since he was but an ordinary mortal and without any authoritative title he put some of his words into the mouth of Saint Udo the Martyr, for people sometimes do not recognize the value of a phrase till they can pin it to saint or statesman.

'Once a woman who had suffered much as you have suffered came to my patron saint, Udo the Martyr,' he told her, 'and the good man said, "If this person had killed you, you could not be accused of suicide. Then how can you blame yourself for this other thing that he has done to you?"'

'But Father,' the voice replied, 'the shame of it! It will kill me.'

'Tut, child. Where there is no fault there can be no shame. If you were to allow the plots which you overheard to be carried out without doing what you might to stop them, that would be a sin. It

would be failure to do your Christian duty. But this other — pooh. You know that you did no wrong.'

'But father, what can I do to stop the plot? I am nobody.'

'So we are all in the sight of the One above. Even the duke. Even the Pope. We cannot always accomplish things but we can try. I should myself do what I could if I knew about it.'

'But you do know.'

'Not yet. What I have heard in the confessional is a secret. I cannot act upon it. But if I were told again, face to face, then my duty would be something besides silence.'

'But my child,' he went on, 'have you no sins to confess to me before I give you absolution? We have been so concerned with your sorrows that we have forgotten that other side of it.'

She told him of one or two minor transgressions, and he prescribed the tiniest of penances, a 'pater' and an 'ave' or two, that she might be sure to understand that he saw no fault in her. And when he had given her absolution she departed, comforted, he hoped.

He heard little of what the other penitents who had been awaiting their turn at the little wicket told him. What matter if this one had quarreled with her neighbor and that other had missed mass

on Corpus Christi? He was thinking of something more serious, of growing threats from high places, of the menace of the castle brooding over the city and reaching out for whatever it wanted.

Now there was no longer even the doubt of hope about the purpose of the duke's invitation to dinner. Father Udo was to be made an instrument of the mighty man's desire; and if he should turn a deaf ear to all cajolery and a firm face to all threats, what then? Well, that was with God.

If the duke thought that either his favor or his power could sway Father Udo from his duty, he would learn better. He would find that he was dealing with a priest and a man — not too worthy a priest, perhaps, and not too strong a man, but worthy enough and strong enough to hold out, with the help of God, against all that the power of the castle might do.

Failing in all else the duke might use plain brute force against his duchess. But neither the Emperor nor the Pope was likely to let such a thing pass unnoticed. It was one thing to punish an erring wife and quite another to take unjustified measures against a woman whom every visiting prince or legate of the last five years could not but remember as the beautiful and gracious hostess of Colenna Castle. She might even have cultivated one or two particularly against an hour of need, Father Udo

did not know about that, but whether this was the case or not she had not neglected the opportunity for gaining influence which her position as Duke Rufio's wife had given her.

So it would be necessary for the duke to prove his case against her before taking any action, if he wanted to be safe. And as he could see but one way of doing that and was proceeding to take it, Father Udo sensed very bad times ahead.

There seemed to be elements of unfairness about the situation which were difficult to explain. Of course Heaven dealt justly with mortals, but why should he, Father Udo, have to submit to all the unpleasant consequences of a sin when he had not had the pleasure of committing it?

He turned to his newly created patron saint for an answer, for since Udo the Martyr was a personification of his own ideal he could get a better perspective by considering his own problems in relation to him. He could thus stand off and look at himself, not as he was but as he would like to have been, in the situations in which he found himself. And he saw that the saint's idea of both pleasure and consequences furnished the solution of the problem. Udo the Martyr wouldn't have wanted the pleasure of committing the sin, couldn't have considered it a pleasure. And he would not have worried much about its punishment either. His

principal concern would have been with his own course, his enjoyment in doing right, his unhappiness in doing wrong. And if other people didn't see it that way, why, that was their affair.

But one had to be practical, too. It behooved Father Udo to do what he could to avert disaster, and he wondered just what he could do. To be forewarned might be, as they said, to be forearmed, but what arms could avail an elderly priest and two women against all the forces of the duchy?

And suppose the lady of the confessional did not appear, what then? Would he be justified in using the information which she had given him under the seal of secrecy? Wasn't that just the sort of thing the duke proposed to do? Oh, yes, the object was more worthy, and all that, but wouldn't it weaken his own morale and make impossible a firm stand against the enemy?

He shrank from the problem, feeling that for the moment the best thing to do was to pray that she would come. And even as he prayed, sitting there in the sunlight and talking to God like a trusting child, she crossed the garden toward him, a fair young thing with great sadness in her eyes. And he, seeing that sadness and knowing its source, rose and greeted her and bade her be seated where he had been sitting. For he wished it to be very plain that he respected her despite her misfortune.

'Misfortune,' he reflected, 'arouses more disrespect than wickedness; for misfortune is always weak, while wickedness is sometimes only too powerful.'

The lady took the seat, which was only a sort of box against the wall, and sat with her hands folded in her lap. She was more peaceful of mien than he had expected, for which he was thankful, since he had, despite all his encounters with sorrow and despair, never been able to harden himself to a woman's sobs.

She seemed in no hurry to begin her story, and he did not hasten her. She sat and looked about the garden, not with curiosity or appreciation but almost vacantly, and he knew that she was seeing little of what her eyes lighted upon. Still, one had to say something, something casual, and the flowers were as good a subject as any.

'The roses are fragrant this time of year, aren't they?' he remarked.

It occurred to him as he did so that he sounded like a fool.

She did not reply for a moment, then spoke as though surprised that any one had addressed her.

'Oh, the roses.'

Silence. While it endured Father Udo felt like more of a fool than when he had talked.

Suddenly she looked up.

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'I hope you don't despise me, Father,' she said.

He had a little pout which, combined with a quick wagging of hand and head, served to say, 'Don't be foolish.' He employed it.

'How should I?' he demanded. 'Are you not here risking your life to prevent a great wrong?'

She looked surprised, then shook her head with vehemence.

'No,' she declared. 'I am here to avenge myself if there is any way in which I may do it.'

As she spoke the sadness lifted from her eyes and Father Udo caught sight of a fire that burned, white hot, in her spirit. He fingered his shaven chin.

'No, my child,' he told her. 'Vengeance belongs to the Lord.'

She clenched her unjeweled hands.

'He seems very slow to use it against the great,' she retorted. 'And perhaps He would not mind my helping Him with it.'

Father Udo gave a slight start. He had been standing before her. Now he took a nervous pace away, turning afterward to regard her.

'The duke may find his punishment in another world,' he ventured.

He said this because he did not know what else to say, not having the authority of the confessional behind him here. Immediately the lady made him regret it.

'If we are to think only of that other world, why should we bother about the people whom he threatens now?' she demanded. 'They'll pass through a little suffering and then go to an eternal reward, if they deserve it. I thought that you were a practical man, Father, since it is said that you relieve want where you find it instead of shriving the starving and sending them on to heaven.'

She made as if to rise, and Father Udo motioned with both hands for her to retain her seat and her composure. As she sat back he breathed easier.

Why had he talked about the other world at such a moment, anyhow? He was inclined to think that people paid too much attention to it. What did a man deserve for his good deeds if he only did them to get to heaven? Certainly nothing so good as eternal bliss. Other-worldliness was in many ways as bad as worldliness. Well, he'd have to start over.

'Forgive me,' he said, 'for speaking like the silly old man that I am. We are in this world now, and since the Lord saw fit to make our surroundings He must have intended that we take notice of them. To fail to do so would be an insult to Him.'

Then he got back to what he wanted to say.

'But really,' he went on, 'I think that we have something more serious to consider here than just vengeance, which looks neither toward present nor toward future but back upon a past which has

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ceased to be. I seek to prevent wrong, not to punish the duke. However, let us not quarrel about this. If you have come to tell me something, I shall be glad to hear it.'

He chuckled.

'We are traveling the same road to different cities, that is all,' he concluded. 'You prefer your city and I prefer mine, but we both want to travel.'

Later on he might give her spiritual advice upon vengeance, but this was no time for it. To-day — yes, and to-morrow and the next day — she was not likely to be in a receptive mood.

She told him her story, much as she had told it in the confessional, but at greater length. She was evidently in a firmer mood than she had been in earlier that morning. Then she had been a sorrowful, dejected thing. Now she was almost fiercely indignant, and as the priest looked, fascinated, upon her scornful lips and blazing eyes he experienced a fleeting sensation of being in the presence of something fearful in its potency — perhaps the latent power of God. He felt infinitesimal before the woman.

When she had finished her story she stared for a moment into space. Then she looked directly at Father Udo.

'You advise me against vengeance,' she smiled. 'Well, perhaps it will be enough to satisfy me if we

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make the duke suffer through his foiled desires.
Unless —'

She swallowed hard and sprang up.

'If anything should come of this that robs me of my betrothed,' she cried, and her look was hard as steel, 'then, when I have nothing left to lose, I shall know what to do!'

She walked straight by him and on across the garden through the gate, casting no glance to right or left. And Father Udo, gazing after her, nodded gravely.

The latent power of God! The devil might tamper with miracles, but — when he did, well —

The duke had made a very serious mistake.



CHAPTER X

ALONG the road over which Francesco had coursed in the dawn Father Udo plodded in the noontide, a slowly moving black spot on a ribbon of gold. His broad-brimmed hat shaded his perspiring face well enough but it also kept such air as was stirring, which was not very much, from refreshing him with its touch, and ever and again he stopped to mop himself with his great handkerchief. He fanned himself with that handkerchief, too, most persistently and futilely, and beneath each tree that cast a shadow upon the road he paused to rest.

As he stood in the meager shelter of one he raised his eyes toward Castle Baldini, smiling on its hill-top.

'Thus we mortals plod our way toward heaven,' he reflected, 'where there is shade and water.'

It was just a whimsical thought, for the fact was that he did not mind the plodding of his everyday life but drew great joy from it. And he did not mind the hot road either, for the more the sun beat down on him the more he would enjoy arriving up there where the green tops of poplars showed above a friendly white wall.

'The world is full of marvelous compensations,' he told himself. 'I start out from the monastery in

the grip of a great fear. The heat makes me so uncomfortable that it squeezes my fear out of my mind. And when I arrive on the hilltop up there I shall find so much relief in a bit of shade and a drink of water that I shall be quite contented with life.'

And realizing the effect that the banishment of discomfort would have upon him he ceased to be uncomfortable, so that when he panted his way through the narrow gate of Bianca's garden he was already smiling, and his very moppings of brow and neck took on the nature of a ceremony.

Francesco was there with his little Bianca! Ah, there was something to cheer the heart of an old man! As they came forward to meet him, he stood still, beaming.

'Ah, my children,' he puffed, 'it is a pleasure to see you together.'

He dabbed away with his great handkerchief.

'Welcome, Father,' smiled Bianca. 'What brings you up our steep road on such an afternoon?'

He paused with the handkerchief held to his forehead. He heard the tinkle of water in the wall fountain hard by.

'Wait,' he said, 'I must wet my throat. And I think I'd better sit down somewhere in the shade.'

Going to the fountain he drank copiously. The water tasted delicious, and such quenching of his thirst never harmed him, perhaps because he did

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not know how bad it is for the human anatomy. Then, with the other two following, he crossed to a seat beneath a spreading pepper tree.

Down he sat with a grunt of contentment.

‘There, that’s better,’ he remarked. ‘Oh, I suppose that to you, Francesco, the road hither from the city is a very romantic trail, but that is because you are a romantic young man!'

Bianca looked embarrassed. Francesco grinned as though ill at ease. So Father Udo, fearing lest a silence follow his pleasantry, pattered on.

‘To me it is a puffy climb, for I am a puffy old man.’

It occurred to him as he glanced about the garden, drawing in deep breaths of its fragrant air, that no two people ever travel the same road, that perhaps no person travels the same road twice, though he wear it away with his footsteps. For each personality and each mood colors the journey, changing its nature. The farmer with his market cart, the soldier marching grimly in rank with his fellows, the lover strolling hand in hand with his beloved, the widow following her husband to the field of silence; who could imagine that they went by the same path even though they followed the same windings and stumbled upon the same stones?

Those three men of the parable, the priest, the Levite and the Good Samaritan, had all gone down

from Jerusalem to Jericho. Yes, and so had the man who fell among thieves. But to each the road had its personality, which was the reflection of his own.

One day we notice the mountain peaks; another the meadows. Going we are impressed most by fruitful trees; coming we see but the barren sand of a river's wash. And if life was a journey —

He saw Graf, lying panting in the shadow of a lilac bush, his body wrapped in a white bandage.

'But Francesco,' he inquired, 'what has happened to your poor dog?'

The young man smiled.

'He saved my life this morning,' he said, 'and got a sword thrust for his pains.'

Father Udo raised his eyebrows.

'Indeed?' he exclaimed.

Then he saw that in Francesco's sleeve was a mended spot under which the outlines of another bandage showed.

'And you too have been wounded!' he cried.
'What has happened?'

'Well,' Francesco returned, 'the most important thing is that Bianca has bandaged a scratch and mended a torn sleeve for me.'

Bianca, standing beside him, broke in.

'He saved me from three assassins this morning,' she said.

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'And she saved me from one,' declared the young man.

'Only after he had saved me!'

Father Udo held up his hands.

'From what you say,' he interposed, 'this garden is full of heroes and heroines who are so concerned with their own modesty that they will not tell me what they have done. Perhaps I'd better ask Graf. But then he has been a hero too.'

Whereupon Francesco and Bianca looked at each other. The girl nodded.

'I think we had better tell Father Udo all about it,' she said. 'For we need the advice of some one we can trust.'

So they told the story from beginning to end. And in concluding they did not neglect to mention the fact that the horses ridden by the soldiers came from the duke's own stables.

'Bianca and I have tried to puzzle out why the duke should wish to harm her,' said Francesco, 'but we can't do it. And we're worried. For if he has set his heart upon having her possessions we don't see how we can stop him, though you can count on it that ——'

He hesitated.

'That you, the most expert swordsman in the duchy, will make him pay dear,' Father Udo supplied. 'Which would not worry him in the least,

since he would be paying with the lives of others. However, I don't think that the duke could have been behind this attack.'

'You don't?'

'I am sure that he wasn't.'

'But these horses ——'

Father Udo gazed, half smiling, at Francesco.

'Did you ever pay court to the lady Julia?' he asked.

Francesco's answer was so slow in coming that Father Udo spoke himself.

'Oh, you did?'

'Not seriously, Father,' said Francesco, his words now hastening out as though trying to overtake each other. 'Oh, I've sung her a serenade now and then, but one must do that sort of thing. But what — You don't mean ——'

Father Udo nodded.

'Oh, foolishness, Father. She wouldn't be interested in me!' cried the young man. 'She is the duke's daughter. And I was not interested in her. I merely paid her a compliment or two, like all the world.'

'And unfortunately she had to like your compliment better than those of the rest of the world,' Father Udo remarked. 'She is a strange woman, as ruthless, I suspect, as her father. Would she have access to the castle stables?'

‘But, Father ——’

‘And would not men hired to kill some one whom the duke did not want killed have need of exceptionally good horses to carry them out of the country?’

‘But why,’ asked Bianca, ‘are you so sure that the duke does not want me killed?’

‘My little Bianca,’ Father Udo told her, ‘he would not harm you for worlds. You are safe from him so long as the duchess lives. If that kind lady should die then you would be threatened, I’ll admit, but not with death.’

‘With what, then, Father?’

‘With matrimony.’

Bianca gasped.

‘You’re joking!’ she said.

Smiling, Father Udo looked up at her.

‘It would take more than a joke to make me climb your hill under the noonday sun,’ he assured her. ‘I am not a demountable centaur like Francesco here, and a black cassock is more conventional than comfortable. I came up here to warn you that you are threatened with two things, each of which seems worse than the other: the hatred of Julia and the love, if you wish to call it that, of her father.’

‘But how do you know?’ demanded Francesco. Father Udo shook his head.

'I can't tell you that,' he declared. 'Suffice it to say that I do know.'

Francesco put his hand on the hilt of his sword.

'I guess we can cope with Julia's methods,' he observed. 'And as for the duke, well, the duchess has always been in good health.'

There was a suggestion of sadness in Father Udo's answering nod.

'Perhaps too good,' was what he wanted to say, and it seemed to him so very apropos that he had a hard time fighting back the impulse to say it. He was always getting into such psychological difficulties, for to him a *bon mot* was not one of those idle words for which man shall render an accounting, but a bit of condensed happiness which would render a genuine, if very tiny, credit balance on the book wherein the acts of man were entered.

But such a comment on the noble lady's health would have been more than a mere pleasantry. It would have been a very unkind bit of innuendo, a morsel of the sort of gossip for which he was wont to pile on penances in the confessional. Therefore he must avoid it.

For to him gossip was, if not one of the seven deadly sins, at least a very grievous offense. Father Udo had developed a little classification all his own to guide him in the levying of penances, and among them was a group which he styled 'sins of unkind-

ness.' These ranked well toward the serious end of the list, much worse, for instance, than such a sin as the duchess had committed, so that gossiping old ladies who came to him with tales of their neighbors' vices sometimes received penances which quite upset them, along with scoldings and lectures on the true meaning of Christian charity.

Moreover, while he knew of the duke's schemes from something which had been told him outside the confessional, he was in no such situation with regard to the duchess. Her indiscretions had been so discreetly committed that, with the exception of persons who would suffer quite as much from their discovery as she, no one but he, her confessor, knew about them with any degree of certainty.

He couldn't crack jokes about what he had heard in the confessional. That would be as bad as the thing the duke wanted him to do. Besides, he knew the value of keeping his own counsel. Though it was well to warn his young friends of their danger it might be quite disastrous to discuss, even with them, its underlying causes.

Guarding a secret was very much like guarding a prisoner — once you let it out of sight there was no telling how far it might run.

'Let us wish her a long and prosperous life,' he murmured; and let it go at that.

He looked from Francesco to Bianca and back to

Francesco. They were such a gallant pair, slender and firm-limbed and keen-eyed. They loved the open country and horses and the excitement of dashing rides; each had been brought up to that sort of thing. And it seemed to him a shame that since they liked to do the same thing they should not do it together.

Such a match was ideal. And it might offer a solution for his problems as well as for their own.

'If our fair Bianca but had a protector,' he began; then broke abruptly off.

For he thought of David, the Lord's anointed, and the wrong which he had wrought upon his faithful captain Uriah, honorably married to that Bath-sheba whom the king desired. And if the man chosen of Heaven to rule Israel had stooped to the murder — oh, very covert of course — of one of his captains that he might possess the poor fellow's wife, what was to be expected of Rufio, the dark-browed duke of Colenna? No, there was no safety there.

'What were you about to say, Father?' Francesco asked eagerly.

Father Udo sighed. He had been here but a few minutes, had scarcely had time to cool off and get his breath, but he felt that he had better hasten home. He hated to leave the shelter of the poplars and the tinkle of waters in the little fountain and

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immerse himself in the heat that lay, almost visibly thick, on the road. But whatever he had the impulse to say seemed to be wrong, and the one way to be sure not to say it was to take himself off.

And he did not believe in matchmaking. Marriage was to him something too holy to be arranged, to be entered into for the sake of expediency. One time, long ago, he had gone so far as to refuse to officiate at a union of convenience, saying, ‘Better love without marriage than marriage without love.’

He wanted Francesco and Bianca to turn to each other, but not for safety. They must be drawn together by a quivering urge that would blot from their minds everything, the duke, the dark Julia, themselves even. Without that their union would be nothing, and as far as its holiness or its happiness was concerned, why, Bianca might as well marry the duke.

They were more likely to feel that urge in his absence than in his presence. A priest was more necessary to a marriage than to a courtship. He came in at the finish, but there were times when he, like any one else, was likely to be in the way.

Besides, Father Udo had just had an idea, a big idea so he felt, for his sermon on Saint Udo the Martyr.

He hoisted himself up from his seat and held out a hand to each of his friends.

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‘Was I going to say something?’ he asked. ‘Oh, well, it was probably something very foolish. And I must run along. I have a very important sermon to prepare.’

He squeezed Francesco’s sinewy hand and patted Bianca’s dainty, firm one, then turned his face toward the gate. It wouldn’t be so bad going back to the monastery. It was downhill most of the way.

And that sermon! Oh, it would be a marvel. Let’s see —

He chuckled aloud as the blast of warm air beyond the gate struck him. He would make his own story, with appropriate modifications, the story of Saint Udo the Martyr, anticipating the duke by telling from the pulpit how the saint had repulsed the wicked king who tried to wring from him the secrets of the confessional. It might be necessary to use an anachronism or two, but no one except perhaps Count Gregorio would know the difference. And what a joke it would be on the duke!



CHAPTER XI

BIANCA!'

'Francesco!'

All afternoon they had talked of this and that and nothing. Now, when the shadows of the poplars had grown long and up among the leaves little birds twittered with joy at the coming of the evening breeze, Francesco still lingered.

He looked long into the deep dark eyes of the girl, looked and trembled, half fearful.

'You saved my life to-day, Bianca.'

'You saved mine, Francesco.'

They stood beside the fountain like two enchanted beings, not the dashing riders that the countryside knew so well, but two people who felt weak, as though in the presence of something so great that it overawed them.

'Oh, I am a man, Bianca. Battle cries and sword thrusts and danger are part of my life. But you ——'

'I am but a woman, Francesco. I fled like a woman. But I did come back.'

'You are wonderful.'

Francesco wondered why he stood rooted to the spot. He wanted to move forward, to reach out his arms for her, but he could not. He was not without

experience in what men called love, but this was something different. It made of him a coward, so great a coward that though he would have faced a thousand deaths for her he dared not touch her hand.

‘No, Francesco, I am not wonderful. But you — you risked your life for me when you had nothing to gain by it.’

‘Oh, Bianca, had I nothing to gain?’

The dark eyes dropped. How long her lashes were! Francesco spoke again.

‘You heard what Father Udo said — that you need a protector?’

She had picked a flower and was twisting its stem.

‘I do not want a protector, Francesco.’

His heart sank. Surely she knew what was in his mind. He choked and could not speak. After a pause Bianca looked up from her flower.

‘I do not want a protector,’ she repeated.

But this time she accented the last word, and Francesco broke away from that fearfulness of his, cast it off as though he were shaking away restraining bonds.

He caught her hands in his. They opened and lay there peacefully. The crushed flower dropped to the ground.

‘Bianca,’ he whispered, ‘do you want a comrade?’

Do you want some one to face the world gladly and gayly by your side? Oh, Bianca, I have long had a dream of you!'

'You have dreamed of me?'

'Yes, of you riding away with me in the dawn along the great road — the king's highway, some call it — when the stars are fading out and the mists streak the hills. There we would find happiness, we two together, galloping on through life, yes, and beyond, through the day and on into the night.'

Her hands pressed his. Then they relaxed as she spoke.

'I fear for you, Francesco,' she murmured. 'The duke —'

'Let us laugh at him, dearest. We cannot be conquered if we but go to our adventure side by side, two against the world.'

Smiling, she sighed.

'The world is very strong, Francesco.'

'And we will be very brave, as brave as the world is strong.'

Drawing her hands against his breast he released them. His arms went about her.

'Francesco,' she said, as her fingers traced along the embroidered patterns on his doublet, 'I can mean but one thing to you, danger. Without me you are safe. No one wishes you ill. With me —'

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She broke off, and he could see that her face was sad.

‘Danger?’ he laughed. ‘What is life but danger? What is adventure but danger? And if love, too, can be danger then — what more can I ask of life than love and adventure and you?’

‘I fear for you,’ she repeated.

And since she would say this he pressed his lips upon hers that she might not say it again, pressed them and held them there, glorying in the warm softness of her.



CHAPTER XII

WITH precisely the amount of pomp and pageantry due his rank and station, Prince Gustav, envoy extraordinary of the Emperor, came clattering into Colenna. In the van of his cavalcade rode the heralds attached to his office, two striplings upon perfectly matched white horses, with the imperial quarterings embroidered upon their mantles and upon the banners which hung from their silver trumpets. Behind them were scores of horsemen, lean, stalwart fellows resplendent in burnished armor, flying their master's pennons from the shafts of their raised lances. More heralds, these the prince's own; some black-clad scribes; a chaplain, who looked most unhappy as his mount jogged along. Then the rear guard, large and business-like.

But where was the prince? The townsfolk did not see him as his party cantered through the streets, for the eye, dazzled by the splendor of his cortège, failed to pick him out. Only at the castle, where the glittering ones dismounted and formed a double rank enclosing a sort of lane of honor, did his identity become manifest. He was a stout, pleasant-faced man, clad in a crimson robe and mounted upon the largest horse of all. And when he dis-

mounted it was with a grunt, half of effort, half of satisfaction.

On horseback he had seemed small and soft, but as he stood upon his feet and advanced to meet Duke Rufio it was evident that he was really a huge man, taller than any one else in the yard and powerful for all of his surplus flesh. He looked like a hearty eater and a good drinker, which indeed he was in the time-honored German fashion. He had a motto which covered his behavior at table—‘Excesses in moderation,’ which meant plenty of meat and plenty of beer.

His salutation to the duke contained exactly the amount of mixed cordiality and condescension fitting for the converse of a royal prince and imperial envoy with the ruler of a duchy. For being a German he took his duties very seriously, which was in a way a pity, since those who knew him in his private life saw quite another man. His eyes could twinkle most merrily over a mug of beer and he knew many a drinking song, some of which had words, ah, well —

He could be human enough to play on the floor with children and poke pudgy infants in their healthy Teutonic chests with an equally pudgy finger. He even went so far at times as to chuck buxom serving maids under the chin, for he was quite a devil with the ladies in a very harmless sort of way.

But that was at home. On trips of state, such as he was now making through Lombardy and Tuscany, he rarely forgot that he was the Emperor's representative and never stepped far out of character. If he dressed with reasonable simplicity himself, it was for the sake of comfort, and he saw to it that the younger men of his party, who were more capable anyhow of wearing steel and embroidery with some grace, held up the sartorial end of things. And at receptions and other functions of the sort he could be quite the stiffest and most glittering person present.

He quite enjoyed such affairs and reveled inwardly in the homage offered him, for he was human, and he derived great satisfaction from the fulfillment of his duties, taking considerable pride in writing long accounts of his findings to his imperial master, who handed them over to a scholar to digest for him, with instructions to report on them orally in not more than a dozen sentences.

But this did not mean that the Emperor failed to appreciate his services. The twelve-sentence rule was in a way a compliment, for in most correspondence of a voluminous sort there is not likely to be that much material of import to an empire, and the sovereign had good reason for considering the prince a keen observer. He was even more than

that, for he sometimes sensed things without himself being able to tell why or how.

It was a matter of common knowledge, for instance, that he had foreseen and forestalled the Genoese defection of three years ago, but neither he nor others knew just how it had happened. Asked about it by the Emperor, he had shrugged and answered strangely.

‘They have such terrible beer in Genoa.’

‘But how did this tell you anything?’ had been the sovereign’s laughing reply. ‘To judge from such standards all Italy is ripe for revolt.’

Prince Gustav had nodded sadly. His diplomatic missions compelled the spending of much time in that thirsty land.

‘I know only too well,’ was his explanation. ‘All through Italy the beer is terrible. But in Genoa it is very terrible. And they have no kraut.’

This was the man who now came to Colenna on his careful rounds of the empire. It devolved upon the duke to play host to him and to make arrangements for the comfort of his retinue, all of which his grace did very well, for it paid to show every courtesy to the representative of the imperial power. The prince and his personal attendants were housed in the castle, while his bodyguard found place in its dependencies. And there was much stir and clatter in the castle kitchen.

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The rumor went abroad that both prince and duke would attend high mass on Sunday and that the congregation would doubtless be the most brilliant seen in the cathedral since the visit of the Emperor himself, some years ago. Abbot Lorenzo heard this and smiled. He smiled even more when the rumor was confirmed. The bishop was to preside at a solemn pontifical ceremony, and there was to be no change in preachers. Father Udo would hold the pulpit.

Poor Abbot Lorenzo! Had he but known where Father Udo stood he would not have smiled. The opportunity for which he had waited during five long years was at hand, and the man upon whom he was relying to turn it to his advantage was the one person in the world most hampered both by temperament and by circumstance.

Everything but the reconciliation went off according to schedule. The ceremony upon Saint Udo's day was magnificent, the congregation quite up to expectations. With a great clattering of hoofs the bodyguards of duke and prince cantered through the streets to form in the cathedral square. Flags waved and trumpets blew. Swords were held high as the two distinguished men rode up with the immediate household of the duke behind them.

They dismounted as the great bells boomed out a

welcome. Up the broad stone steps, carpeted for the occasion, they walked, duke and prince, the duchess and the duke's daughter, Martin and the young captain of the prince's bodyguard, a lean blond fellow from Strassburg, the same who had campaigned with Francesco and had given him a puppy named Graf in recognition for the slight favor of saving his life in battle. While the cheers of the people lining the square resounded about them, they passed beneath the ornate façade and into the cool interior of the house of prayer, to proceed to the ducal place of honor, left vacant these many years.

Duke Rufio had the air of a model churchgoer, crossing himself and bending the knee with all the appearance of humility. The prince, who knew more about most people than they suspected, watched with interest this host of his going through the motions of piety. And he did not miss the clouding of the ducal brow when Father Udo mounted the pulpit to deliver the sermon.

‘The duke,’ he told himself, ‘cannot enjoy sermons.’

For Prince Gustav knew something about Father Udo, too. Among other items he had investigated, during the few days of his stay in Colenna, such things as sanitary conditions and the control of poverty — for he had a foolish idea that there

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might be some connection between these things and plague — and everywhere he had sent his men they had heard reports of the work of Father Udo, so that he had been delighted when informed by the bishop that this man and no other was to preach to him. And it did not occur to him right away that Duke Rufio might dislike the preacher more than a sermon.

As regarded that particular sermon he may have been right, for the priest told the story of Saint Udo the Martyr and his temptation by the king. It seems that the monarch had suspected his queen of unfaithfulness and had called upon the saint, who was her confessor, to tell him whether or not his suspicions were well founded. First he had offered rewards — money for charity and so on — and when this brought no response he had resorted to threats, only to be met with a rebuke for his impertinence in prying into the secrets of the heavenly kingdom.

The priest pointed out that the king's own life had not been blameless and that even if the queen had indeed been indiscreet — a thing which to this day remained a matter of conjecture, since the saint, yielding neither to blandishment nor to force, had persisted in guarding the secret, if secret there was — it would have been no more than he deserved.

Prince Gustav noted that the duke was stirring angrily, that he laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword and muttered things which did not need to be heard to be understood.

‘Aha,’ thought the prince, ‘there’s something funny going on here.’

He felt the eyes of the priest upon him as the story of the martyr continued:

‘What happened then could not happen to-day. We have an Emperor who respects God and the Church and who, by means of his envoys, keeps in touch with the doings of the various rulers beneath him. Saint Udo was martyred because he refused to betray the trust imposed upon him. And as he died he said, “Praise be to God, who has provided that the immortal soul may be stronger than the perishable body.”’

Of course, explained the priest, the king was the real loser by it. He had allowed himself to be carried away by anger, to be carried so far away as to break the laws of God and man by murder, whereas Saint Udo had died with the love of God in his heart and his praise upon his lips.

Then Father Udo dwelt for some time upon the greatness of love. Most virtues, he declared, are negative. We are inclined to consider a man good because of the things that he does not do, but Paul has told the Corinthians that none of these nega-

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tive things count without charity — which, in the Greek, is love. And our Lord himself has intimated that to keep the Commandments is not enough. That is the curse of the lukewarm.

Love is positive. It is the one great virtue, the secret of life, the defier of death. Therefore Father Udo exhorted his hearers to cleave to it, to be kind and forgiving from their hearts and to demand no more from others than they themselves would be willing to give.

'As for myself,' he went on, 'I can think of no fate more blessed than that of Saint Udo the Martyr. God endowed him with a trust, and he fulfilled it. Thus God was kind to him in giving him an opportunity to prove himself and the strength to meet his trial.

'The king, too, had his opportunity, poor man. And had he not been enamored of a lady of his court and thus anxious to rid himself of the queen he might have taken advantage of it. He might have been less suspicious and more forgiving, knowing that human frailty needs infinite forgiveness. Then would he have proved himself indeed worthy of his crown and scepter, for forgiveness is of God just as vindictiveness is of the evil one, and those who are willing to forgive greatly cannot but be blessed with that peace which surpasseth understanding.'

Thus Father Udo ended his sermon, then traced the sign of the cross in the air as symbol of his blessing and left the pulpit.

Prince Gustav turned to the duke.

'That preacher is not eloquent,' he whispered, 'but he is sincere, and I like him. I understand that he is very learned and very charitable.'

'He's a snake!' hissed the duke. 'He shall pay for this!'

'So?' breathed the Emperor's envoy. 'For what?'

The duke did not reply. He had already said too much.

Glancing at the duchess, Prince Gustav noticed that her face was very white.

What was it all about? Why was the duke angry and the duchess frightened? Why had the priest looked directly at him when he talked of the Emperor?

Udo the Martyr — who was he, anyhow? This day was devoted to Saint Udo the Great. And the other Saint Udo — he was — let's see — why, he was called the Austere. Of course there were armies of saints. You couldn't keep track of all of them, but Prince Gustav wondered why the learned monks of Saint Augustine's in Mülhausen, where he had received his education, had never spoken of this extraordinary man.

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Suppose you substituted the words ‘priest’ and ‘duke’ in that story about the saint and the king? Ah!

But at the castle the duchess seemed so serene! Perhaps too serene! Oh, but nothing must happen to that beautiful lady. She had such gracious ways, such a warm smile, such a rich, melodious voice. When she spoke to him, he felt like a schoolboy who hopes, in the presence of a charming little girl, that his face happens to be clean.

He glanced at her again. She was kneeling now, her head bowed in reverence — or was it reverence? Why did the smooth whiteness of her neck make him think of a headsman’s sword? In Colenna it was stoning, wasn’t it?

He shouldn’t be so distracted at mass. What were they singing? Oh, yes, the ‘Agnus Dei.’

‘— *qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.*’

Incense and candles and the soft chanting of the choir. There was indeed something strangely stirring about this solemn service. Prince Gustav bowed his own head and prayed.

‘Thou who takest away the sins of the world have mercy on us.’

Of course it was none of his business, but he liked that priest. Having spent years in judging men, he felt that he knew truly good ones when he saw

them, which was rarely enough, and he would have staked his life upon the kindly faced old preacher's belonging to that class.

Unless his judgment had played him false Father Udo was in trouble, and it wasn't right. But what might he do? He was not commissioned to meddle in affairs of this kind. But —

Ah! He had it! His chaplain hated Italy and the Italians and wanted to go home. Why not grant the poor fellow's wish and arrange to make Father Udo his successor? The good father's superior would doubtless be willing to spare him for a while.

And the duchess? If investigation should show that she was really in danger, she might be summoned to the court for a spell. A letter to the Emperor could bring that about.

‘—*Benedicamus domino.*’

Let us bless the Lord. There was a way out, and it could be made to appear so casual.

Slowly the acolytes with their candles, the deacons, and the bishop with his mitre and crozier filed from the sanctuary. The duke arose, his face clouded with anger. Courtesy compelled him to wait for Prince Gustav, but the prince could see that even that slight restraint sat ill with him. So, not wishing to be an added irritation, he hastened to join his host and accompany him down

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the center of the church toward the great front doors.

The rest of the congregation stood back to let the noble party pass, but halfway down through the throng the duke halted and beckoned to a tall thin man with a neatly cropped whitish beard who stood in the press.

'Count Gregorio,' he said, as the other approached, 'you are a well-read man. Have you ever heard of that Udo the Martyr of whom the priest spoke to-day?'

Prince Gustav's first reaction to this was one of surprise at the duke's lack of courtesy. Custom called for him to present the count to his guest, but the prince realized on the spot that the ruler of Colenna was in a mood which blotted custom completely from his mind and made courtesy a vice rather than a virtue. And right on top of that thought came another — that it would not do to give the duke a negative answer to his question, lest the priest suffer by it.

He stepped back out of the ducal line of vision and tried to catch the count's eye, grimacing and nodding violently, so that any one observing him must have thought him victim of a sad nervous disorder. But the count's eye would not be caught. Not having been presented it was his duty to keep to himself so far as the prince was concerned

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and he looked straight at the duke as he made his reply.

'Why, yes, your grace,' he said. 'Only the other day I had a long talk about him with a friend.'

Prince Gustav's sigh of relief reached the proportions of a small explosion.

'Of course,' he beamed. 'In Germany we all know of him.'

The look of surprise on the count's face did not escape him. He wanted to poke this whimsical-looking old fellow in the ribs and say, 'I'm as good a liar as you are,' but of course that couldn't very well be done then and there.

He didn't know what was behind the other's lie. He would even have thought that there really was a Saint Udo the Martyr had the count not been so surprised. But now that his curiosity was aroused he made up his mind that he would inform himself a bit, for it was a splendid joke and he'd have to tell the Emperor about it one of these days.

He would call on Father Udo that very afternoon. He watched the duke and read perplexity and hesitation in his eyes and in the way he fingered his beard. And as they resumed their half-ceremonial way toward the door he chuckled inwardly.

Yes, it was indeed a splendid joke.

CHAPTER XIII

IN that same dining-room where Father Udo had but a few nights ago been such an uncomfortable guest the duke and Martin sat opposite each other, leaning over the bare table.

‘What do you make of it?’ asked the duke.

Martin’s close-set eyes wandered off into space. He shook his head.

‘What can I make of it?’ he returned.

The duke grunted.

‘That sermon was very apropos,’ he observed.

‘Too much so,’ Martin agreed. ‘And the duchess, who seemed in perfectly good spirits as we went to the cathedral this morning, has gone to her room with a headache.’

‘Hmph.’

They sat for a while in silence. The duke tapped lightly with his fingers upon the table top.

‘Is there any book that holds the names of all the saints?’ he asked after a while.

‘I don’t know, your grace,’ smiled the other. ‘Saints are not exactly in my line.’

‘Well, for once I wish they were,’ retorted the duke. ‘I may be overly suspicious, but that story of Udo the Martyr bore an uncanny resemblance to our own. Still, Count Gregorio seemed to know of him, and even Prince Gustav.’

Martin nodded.

'So it would appear,' he agreed. 'Yet the prince is a German, and what do Germans know about saints?'

'Oh, I suppose they have saints in Germany too,' growled the duke. 'They ape us Italians in everything. And surely the prince had no reason for lying to us.'

Again there was a pause during which Martin regarded his thin fingers as though they were something which he had but lately discovered.

'Of course it might be coincidence,' he ventured. 'And I think that your grace has not shown as much discretion in this matter as would have been wise. If that priest does know anything, your anger of the other night could not but put him on his guard.'

The duke struck the table with his fist.

'Coincidence or not,' he cried, 'he had no right to preach such a sermon! And why should I not be angry? Who is ruler here, anyhow? Oh, I'll make him suffer for his insolence!'

'Softly, my lord,' cautioned Martin. 'You will doubtless be able to accomplish that in time, but unless I am mistaken there are things which you must learn from him first.'

'Learn from him?' shouted the duke. 'Did he not give me notice from the pulpit to-day that he would tell me nothing?'

Martin sat whistling a snatch of music, so softly that the sound was scarcely audible. At last he made an observation.

'It is easy enough to be brave in a pulpit. But in a dungeon —'

He let it go at that. The duke sprang to his feet.

'Good! Good!' he cried. 'At last you stop your fool advice of caution. A dungeon it shall be! And perhaps the rack.'

Seated, Martin held up his hand.

'No, no, your grace, not yet,' he cautioned.
'Not while Prince Gustav is with us?'

'A fig for the Hun!'

'Softly, softly, I pray. I like these Germans no more than you do. But the Emperor is anxious to be reconciled with the Pope and the prince has a way of hearing about things.'

'Damn the Emperor! And damn the Pope!'

Martin arose hastily.

'Sit down, my lord,' he pleaded. 'Sit down. And don't speak so. If some one were to overhear, you would find yourself in a very serious position. Please sit down and let us think this thing out.'

'The priest had a right to preach about his saint if he wanted to,' he went on hastily. 'If there were no Udo the Martyr it might be different, but with two learned men like Prince Gustav and Count

Gregorio vouching for his genuineness it looks as though we were in the wrong.'

For a moment the duke stood irresolute. Then with a shrug, he resumed his seat.

'I suppose you are right,' he owned. 'That accursed priest has us checkmated.'

'Silly fools!' cried a woman's voice.

Martin and the duke looked up, startled, as the portières were pushed aside and Julia glided into the room, scorn in her black eyes and in every line of her slender, silk-clad figure.

'Julia!' roared her father, 'you have been spying on us!'

Julia drew herself up haughtily. If her own plot against one of the women whom she hated had been foiled by the sword of the very man for whom she had hatched it, she was not willing to let an old priest defeat her attempt against the other. And as those in her hire had been wisely silent she might still deal with Bianca.

'Call it spying if you wish,' she replied. 'At least I have been listening. Oh, don't be afraid of me. I shan't tell your ogre of a prince about you or write to the Emperor or the Pope. Was I not the first to suggest that the duchess's confessor might be able to tell you something?'

'Go to your room!' the duke commanded. 'This is no business for a woman.'

Julia laughed.

'It is a business for some one with brains,' she retorted.

'For some one who listens behind curtains?' purred Martin.

'As though you never had yourself,' sneered Julia. 'Though I doubt if you would hear anything if you did. Has neither of you seen anything at all to-day?'

'What do you mean?' snapped her father.

'Well,' she told them, 'here are a few things that you might have noticed in the cathedral had not your piety kept you with your heads bowed. The duchess with her face as white as parchment — and now she is ill; Prince Gustav grimacing like a gargoyle when you asked Count Gregorio about that Udo the Martyr, and trying to catch the count's eye — you could hear his sigh of relief all over the cathedral when the old fellow replied a-right — but of course you didn't notice it.'

'Do you think that the prince prompted the count's reply?' inquired her father.

'I am telling you what I saw, not what I think,' Julia reminded him. 'I saw the count nearly keel over with surprise when the prince seconded his story. But how is it that neither of you saw these things?'

‘Well,’ said Martin, ‘I was behind the rest of the party.’

‘And my father was feeling so well disposed toward all the world that he closed his eyes to them,’ smiled the girl. ‘Had either of you seen what I saw, you would have known immediately that neither the count nor the prince believed that there was any Udo the Martyr.’

‘Then why did they say that there was?’ demanded the duke.

Julia shrugged.

‘I don’t know,’ she admitted. ‘I believe that the count is a friend of Father Udo’s, but he couldn’t very well have been forewarned. As for the prince, well, I am beyond understanding these Germans. He hasn’t been here long enough to have a personal interest.’

‘No,’ added Martin, ‘and he’s rather old.’

The duke looked up hotly.

‘What do you mean, old?’ he growled. ‘He’s but a few years older than I.’

Martin bowed.

‘I ask pardon, your grace,’ he apologized. ‘You see, he’s a German. That makes a difference.’

‘Hm. Does it? Well, maybe.’

The duke sat for a while lost in thought. He motioned with his hand to a chair at the end of the table.

‘Sit down, daughter,’ he invited.

More silence. Then the duke addressed Julia.

‘What do you advise?’ he asked.

She looked at him, then at Martin.

‘I am only a woman,’ she said maliciously.

‘How would I be able to advise you?’

Martin caught the rebuke. He leaned far forward, his elbows on the table.

‘If this priest has made up the story of his saint and spoken a lie from the pulpit,’ he whispered, ‘he deserves punishment. We can get him up here for that and no one need know what questions we ask him. If the Emperor or the Pope investigates, he will but find us devout defenders of the Church. It seems to me that all of a sudden we find ourselves supplied with vindication for anything we may do.’

The duke nodded hopefully, but Julia laughed aloud.

‘Pooh!’ she cried. ‘You set great store upon the horror of the Church for parables. You’ll need a better excuse than that before you lay hands upon Father Udo now that Prince Gustav appears to be interested in him. Else you’ll have the Emperor and the Pope coming together — and not alone — to ask you about it.’

The duke frowned. Martin scowled.

‘I fear that your grace will not have much more

need of my services,' said the latter, 'since he has one of his own blood so capable of advising him what not to do. All the fair Julia needs now is to plan something which will meet her own objections.'

'I may do that, too,' Julia shot back. 'But for the moment it is more important to clear away the silly ideas with which we are burdened, that we may receive sound ones.'

'Then for Heaven's sake let's stop quarreling and get down to reason,' urged her father. 'Only don't drag things out. I am for action as soon as possible.'

'You always are,' murmured his impudent daughter. 'It was by action that you got your duchess.'

'Silence, brat!' thundered the duke.

'Suppose,' interposed Martin, 'that we ask the count and the prince and the priest for the history of Udo the Martyr and compare their stories.'

'Do you think that by now they haven't got their heads together?' Julia queried.

'The prince has been with us all the time,' remarked the duke.

'Yes, and the prince may put off talking to us as long as he pleases,' his daughter reminded him. 'We cannot cross-question him as we can the other two. And even if there were no Udo the Martyr

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all that that could tell us is that Father Udo represents being asked about the confessional.'

'Then let us hear your plan,' Martin challenged.
Julia smiled wiltingly.

'I have a plan, Messer Martin,' she retorted.
'It has been forming even as we talked. The germ of it is yours, but see if it is not better than anything you have thought of yet.'

She paused, and her white teeth glittered.

'For God's sake, speak!' cried the duke.

Seeing that her audience was prepared, Julia unfolded her plan.

'Nothing will rob this priest of the support of Rome so much as sacrilege,' she observed. 'His story before the altar to-day was not sacrilege. But we might begin from there and work toward something better.'

'Such as —'

'Suppose we asked to see a relic of Saint Udo?'
Julia suggested.

'He could easily say that there were none, couldn't he?' countered the duke.

'Yes, he could,' agreed his daughter, 'unless he had some reason for doing otherwise. But suppose he knows what you suspect. Then what?'

'What difference would that make?' grunted her father.

Julia waited, smiling. When she saw that in-

difference on the part of the others had given way to curiosity, she went on.

‘Suppose you pretended to be impressed by the story of the martyr. Suppose you should send him word that you suspected a certain woman in the city of unfaithfulness to her husband and wanted to put her to a test. Suppose you said that you’d be satisfied of her innocence if she’d touch one of the saint’s bones without being struck dead.’

‘Bosh,’ growled the duke. ‘What good would that do?’

‘None, perhaps,’ Julia admitted, ‘if that were as far as you went. You would have to play a part and — oh, you wouldn’t be able to. You have no subtlety.’

‘What? No subtlety?’ cried her father. ‘I can play a part as well as any man in the duchy.’

‘Good! Then you must be very sincere about these relics. You must be reformed by them.’

‘Reformed?’ queried the duke.

‘I mean as regards asking questions about the confessional,’ answered the girl. ‘And you must promise that you will place such relics as he produces under the altar of the castle chapel. All this you will do in good faith, so far as any one knows, and the sacrilege of putting the unknown bones there will rest upon him. What do you think Rome would say to that?’

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'Italy is full of fake relics,' the duke reminded her.

'Not of relics of saints that never existed — and under altars at that,' broke in Martin. 'Your grace, this lady is a genius. We'll get the fellow so thoroughly entangled that anything we may choose to do to him will seem a holy act.'

The duke sat motionless, with brows knitted. Julia laughed and clapped her hands.

'Bravo, Messer Martin,' she cried. 'You have sense enough to recognize cleverness and generosity enough to acknowledge it.'

'Yes,' Martin owned. 'The scheme seems sound. But how will we convince the priest of our sincerity?'

'That will be easy,' declared Julia, 'for he is the sort of fool who likes to think well of people. My father will become very pious. Every day he will go to mass. And he will become reconciled with the priests of Saint Holdo's.'

The duke sprang up.

'No! Never!' he cried.

'But you must,' insisted his daughter.

He pounded the table with his fist.

'I will not!' he roared.

Julia rose with a supple motion that indicated that she shook the whole affair from her shoulders.

'All right,' she cooed. 'We will forget it. If you

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will let a few kind words and a gift or two stand between you and the thing you want, I don't see why we should worry more about it.'

She turned to go.

'Stay!' her father bade her. 'I shall do as you say. But will it not take time?'

'All worth-while things take time,' Martin reminded him. 'With Prince Gustav on the priest's side we must be careful. I'll do most of the talking. And the sooner we get at it the better. You might send the abbot, and the priest, some little gift to-day. And you ought to hear your masses half the time at the abbey and the other half at the cathedral.'

'Then I'll have to talk to the damned monks,' objected the duke.

'Oh,' laughed Julia, 'you can be so penitent that you can't talk.'

'Not a bad idea,' Martin congratulated her. 'Now, your grace, may I start this thing at once?'

The duke nodded gravely. This reconciliation with Saint Holdo's went against his grain, but he could make up for it later.

'At once,' he said.



CHAPTER XIV

FATHER UDO was in the abbey library, which had become more than ever his haunt since the invention of his new patron saint. For he had decided that the doings of Saint Udo the Martyr must not be left to chance lest, like ordinary human actions, they be subjected to the laws of expediency and lose thereby their saintly character. That would never do, for in the troubled days which the good father saw before him there would be much need of a guide, and if Saint Udo was to have the job he must be given the proper qualifications.

The best way to be sure of the saint was to draw as dark a picture as possible of what was coming and make him go through it unfaltering in the right. Then if the worst should come to the worst Father Udo would have an example, the example of a character which from his standpoint at least was ideal, and might, if he were strong enough to follow it, live ideally himself.

So he busied himself composing a Life of Saint Udo the Martyr, wherein the saint would meet and triumph over all conceivable difficulties and temptations — would triumph spiritually, that is, though he might suffer physically. And as he lacked confidence in his literary ability he felt need

of the presence of Homer and Cicero and Saint Augustine to strengthen him in his task. It was for this reason that he did his work in the library instead of in his cell. And if he began his day's work with a prayer to the holy doctor of the Church for aid in his writing, he did not neglect also to ask the powers above to let the blind minstrel stand at his elbow and prompt him in his weak moments.

'If the great Homer does not find it too irksome to leave off singing to his heroes in the Elysian Fields, oh Lord,' he would petition, 'will you send him to aid a poor priest who has little ability and a deep desire to do well?'

Perhaps it was not entirely orthodox to assume that in addition to the Holy City there was in the beyond a countryside where Achilles and Hector and the others dwelt, but Father Udo did not feel that it would be fair to such unfettered spirits to coop them up within a golden wall and make them sing psalms for all eternity. They were men of action, men of the great outdoors, and they would find the limits of heaven very confining. And as for sending them to the realm of flames and sulphur simply because they had never heard of the true God and did not bear the mark of a baptism instituted long after their time, why, that would certainly not be in accordance with divine justice.

'They may not have been Christians,' he told

himself, ‘but how many of us really are, anyhow?’

Being a Christian wasn’t so easy. It was more than a mere matter of sprinkling water upon the forehead and reciting certain formulæ. Those Homeric heroes had lived according to their lights — was that not something? Some of those lights had not been very bright, but, well, that was not true of all pagans. Look at Epictetus. He had more in common with the Man of Calvary than many a pope, and no shame to the Holy Father in that, either.

Epictetus, by the way, quite puzzled him, not by his philosophy but by reason of something far more material. How had the slave been able to get enough parchment or papyrus or whatever it was that one used in his day to write his Manual on? Certainly he must have been hard put to it for this, for look how the matter of paper bothered Father Udo, who was no slave at all.

There was plenty of it, but it was written on; sometimes more than once, which was often a pity and occasionally a crime. Count Gregorio, who had spent much time in Rome, said that in the Pope’s library were many works of great thinkers waiting to be dug out from beneath the writings of less able men of a later era. And occasionally worth-while things were inked upon the same manuscript, to the detriment of both.

The count claimed, for instance, that he had discovered traces of a thing of Cicero's — 'De Republica' he called it — hidden under a commentary of Saint Augustine on the Psalms. Some day that manuscript might be more valued for the work of the Roman than for that of the doctor of the Church. Of course the count was inclined to be a little over-liberal and Saint Augustine was a great man, but it was none the less true that many a worth-while bit of philosophy or poetry might be lost entirely because of the writing over its faded face of something by some one with nothing to say and no ability to say it.

Dearth of paper! What a pity! Father Udo visioned a day when there would be plenty for every one who wanted to write. But he knew that he would never live to see that day. In all of Colenna there was now not enough unused paper to make a single book, and except for a few sheets which the abbot reserved for his official correspondence there was none at all in the monastery.

The worst of it was that most of the people who were able to get paper were not able to do anything worth while with it after they got it. Perhaps there was a curse on the stuff, since it had been introduced into Europe by the Mohammedan Moors. But no. Was it not more likely that, by the divine plan those Saracens were atoning by its introduc-

tion for the terrible crime of Omar, who had burned the Alexandrian library? For the more paper there was the fewer manuscripts would be spoiled by second and third writings spread indiscriminately over things worth while, a vandalism second only to that of the bigoted caliph. These people with nothing to say were so lacking in judgment!

Not so, however, with the palimpsests of Father Udo. He gave the wordy sayers of nothing a taste of their own medicine, and when he sat down to compose the history of his saint he sought out volumes of doctrinal sermons and the memoirs of pompous old abbots to ruin. Before setting pen to a bit of parchment, he would read it carefully to make sure that he was not doing it and the world an injustice, and he was willing to grant each the same terms that Jehovah granted the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah — if there proved to be anything, even half a score of words, worth preserving in it, it was spared.

Harsh terms, perhaps, when applied to literature, with its bushels of chaff and its lonely grains of wheat, but not unfair.

He worked slowly and carefully, for the creation of an ideal character was no task to undertake lightly, and he found that he had to guard against rancor in his saint. And to-day he was considerably distracted, first by the excitement attendant upon

delivering his sermon, and second by the story, which Count Gregorio had hastened to bring him, of the duke's query regarding Udo the Martyr.

What puzzled him most was Prince Gustav's part in it. The count had no explanation to offer for that, and it seemed unlikely that the Emperor's envoy should have confused this synthetic saint with some one else.

The diplomat's quickness of observation and deduction was beyond the possible imagining of the simple priest. Nor did he dream that the stolid-looking German could have become interested in him. Therefore he could not account for what had happened except by the theory that an angel had whispered in the ambassadorial ear. Of course it was difficult to believe that the heavenly powers would prompt him to lie, but then, did not he himself feel that he was creating his fictitious saint with divine sanction?

And how about the deception of Ahab? That was in Holy Writ.

He looked it up. Yes, it was right there, in the Second Book of Chronicles, in the eighteenth chapter, beginning with the nineteenth verse. Ahab was a wicked king. Well, Rufio was a wicked duke. And the deception practiced on Ahab had brought about his death, while that turned against the duke was but to save the lives of others. Yes,

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taking it all in all, there could be no explanation of Prince Gustav's action so satisfactory as that which assumed an angelic whisper.

He had reached this point in his meditations when he heard a sound behind him and turned his head. The tight-lipped Martin was standing in the doorway.

Father Udo put down his book.

'Did you want to see me?' he asked.

'Yes,' purred the other. 'I have come with an important message from the duke.'

Father Udo sighed. Messages from the duke were not likely to be very comforting. But much as he distrusted Martin he felt that the man had extricated him from a very difficult situation on the night of his dinner at the castle, and it therefore behooved him to be polite.

'Come in and sit down,' he invited.

Martin sat. He glanced from the priest to the manuscripts on the table before him.

'I hope I do not disturb you too much,' he apologized, 'but perhaps you will forgive me when you hear why I have come.'

Father Udo bowed.

'I am always at your service,' he said.

Martin paused for a moment as though wondering just how to begin his story. He had decided to tell the priest as many facts as the poor man was

likely to find out anyhow and build up from there.

'Well,' he began slowly, 'let me say first of all that his grace was very angry after your sermon of this morning. I can't explain why, but I do know that he doubted the very existence of that Udo the Martyr upon whom you preached. But having heard from two very learned men that his doubts were without foundation, he was deeply impressed, so much so, in fact, that he has sent me to express penitence for having quizzed you about the confessional the other night. And he has sent you ten gold coins for your charity work along with the promise never to ask you or any other priest such things again.'

From beneath his robe Martin produced a leather pouch which he tossed upon the table. Father Udo gave it but a single glance.

'The money will do much good,' he said. 'But the promise pleases me even more. And his grace really did not ask me anything unwarranted, though I thought for a while that he was going to.'

'Well, he won't now,' Martin assured him. 'He is a different man. The first thing he did upon returning to the castle was to send for his confessor to shrive him.'

Father Udo smiled. If this were but true —

'And he is sending a note of friendship to your

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abbot,' Martin went on, 'along with gifts to the abbey. The old estrangement is ended.'

'Praise be to God!' cried Father Udo.

For he had not been unmindful of Abbot Lorenzo's problem. He was very glad to see it solved. And he felt that there could be no better proof of the duke's sincerity than this.

'All this is your work,' Martin told him.

Father Udo shook his head.

'No,' he murmured, 'it is God's work. My sermon was neither eloquent nor appealing.'

'It was sincere, though,' Martin countered. 'And it so moved the duke that he wants to build an altar to Saint Udo the Martyr.'

'Oh,' gasped Father Udo, 'I'm sure that isn't necessary.'

'Perhaps not,' Martin agreed, 'but that is the duke all over. When he gets his heart set upon a thing he stops at nothing.'

Martin smiled as he said those last words. They were more true than the priest suspected.

'But —'

Poor Father Udo didn't know what to say. This was a turn which, even in his efforts to read the future for the sake of Saint Udo, he hadn't dreamed of.

'And he would like to get some relics of the saint to put in the altar,' Martin continued.

Father Udo sprang up.

‘I — why — ’

He sat down again.

‘I don’t know where he can find any,’ he said, remembering himself.

Martin shook his head sadly.

‘That is too bad,’ he breathed, ‘for there is a much more important reason for our getting some. I guess I’d better tell you the whole story, Father.’

‘Why, what is it?’ inquired the priest.

‘It has to do with the duke’s curiosity about the confessional,’ Martin put forth. ‘A certain lady — I may not mention her name — is suspected by her husband of infidelity. Now, as you know, the law in Colenna is that such a sin shall be punished by death.’

Father Udo nodded.

‘Yes, I know,’ he returned. ‘And I cannot but wonder at such a law. Taking a life is a very serious matter, for life is a gift of God.’

‘I quite agree with you, Father,’ smiled the other. ‘Oh, I know that I have a reputation for plots against this one and that one, but half of it is undeserved and the other half greatly regretted. However, that is neither here nor there. Now, the duke, who is very close to the husband of this lady, is investigating. He believed that you were her confessor; that is why he questioned you so rudely

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the other night. But when he heard the story of Udo the Martyr he thought of a better way of finding out her guilt or innocence.'

'Yes?'

Father Udo leaned forward, all attentiveness. But Martin was in no hurry to come to the point.

'I don't mind telling you,' he owned, 'that I consider his idea rather — well, foolish. But since I have found out the name of the lady in question — just to-day — I am anxious to do anything that I can to help her, for she has been very kind to me. Before, it was different. I suggested asking you about confessions, for frankly, I'm not very religious and don't hold your secrets as sacred.'

'I do!' declared Father Udo, thrown suddenly on guard.

'Naturally, naturally!' Martin agreed. 'And it is an honor to you. I just want you to understand me. And now that you do I'll go straight to the point.'

Father Udo sighed. He was glad to hear it.

'Please do,' he urged.

'At the castle this morning after mass the duke said to me again and again, "If we could only get a relic of Saint Udo!"' Perhaps you don't know that he is quite superstitious.'

Father Udo shook his head.

‘Well, he is,’ Martin said. ‘Perhaps it would not in this case seem superstition to you, a man of the Church. At any rate, I finally got from him what he wanted of the relic. He said that if this woman would dare to touch one of the bones of Saint Udo and if no harm should come to her from it he would believe her innocent and drop the whole matter.’

He paused, then shrugged his shoulders.

‘But if there aren’t any,’ he concluded, ‘I guess that ends that.’

Father Udo sat gazing at a crack in the floor. His thoughts were, well — everywhere. After a long time he looked up, sighing.

‘I’m afraid it would be hard to find one,’ he breathed.

Martin shook his head sadly.

‘Too bad. Too bad,’ he murmured. ‘It would be so easy to clear the lady’s name if we could find one. For I personally don’t think that even if she were guilty as Jezebel any harm could come to her from touching a bone. And if we don’t do something to save her I fear that her husband will take measures against her. So please try to locate a relic for us. And if you should find one let me know.’

He rose.

‘Now, good-bye, Father,’ he said. ‘And please try not to think too harshly of me. I know I have done many sinful things in my life but if with your

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help I can save this lady I shall feel that I have atoned for at least a few.'

He bowed and was gone, leaving Father Udo sunk in thought. It was a desperate situation that confronted the poor priest? What should he do? What did Heaven want him to do? Would he never cease being confronted by a choice between two evils?

What would Saint Udo the Martyr have done?
He needed help here.

He tried to return to his manuscript, but could write nothing. For an hour he sat, pondering. Wouldn't Heaven send him some help, some sign?

He was still sitting there when Prince Gustav came to talk with him.

CHAPTER XV

FATHER UDO dropped his quill and scrambled to his feet, knocking over his inkpot as he did so. Why did the abbot have to interrupt him by bringing around this distinguished visitor, to whom one must pay Heaven only knew what ceremonial courtesy? Of course if Prince Gustav wanted to be shown around the abbey — But it was so disconcerting.

The abbot beamed upon him.

‘Prince Gustav has come to call upon you, Father,’ he announced, and retired.

Father Udo staggered, making a bow that was particularly awkward by reason of his having to put his hand upon a bookshelf for support. The man who represented the temporal power of God upon earth as manifested in that Holy Roman Empire which, though it had its seat in Germany, was none the less Holy and Roman, calling on him! Oh, there must be some mistake.

‘I’m afraid you have got the wrong person, your highness,’ he ventured.

The prince shook his head. His eyes twinkled.

‘No,’ he replied. ‘Wrong persons don’t interest me. I turn them over to the soldiers. But you are a right person.’

If it wasn’t a mistake, then, it must be a miracle.

And after all, was that so remarkable? Hadn't the prince done another miraculous thing that morning? Perhaps he shared in some way the touch of that sort of thing that must come down to the Emperor with the divine right.

But what did one do in the presence of a prince? How silly to know Homer and Horace, Marcus Aurelius and Seneca, and to be ignorant of the simple rules of etiquette necessary for the proper reception of an imperial envoy who has dropped in on one in one's study. Or maybe it wasn't so silly, but it was disconcerting.

Perhaps the best thing to do was to acknowledge ignorance and treat him like a man.

'Pardon me, your highness,' stammered the good father, 'but I don't know the rules of ceremony which should be followed when addressing one of your station.'

Prince Gustav smiled his broad German smile.

'What is a matter of ceremony between friends?' he returned, as he seated himself upon one of the long benches. 'One stands upon ceremony, and I don't like to stand. Sit down and let's have a chat.'

Father Udo sank back to the seat from which he had lately risen. All this was completely beyond the realm of reason. Exalted persons weren't supposed to act like — like human beings. And the

prince had said, ‘between friends,’ as though they were old cronies. Moreover, he seemed to mean it; he looked so sort of — well, friendly.

‘I am at your service,’ said the priest.

‘On the contrary,’ laughed the prince, ‘I am at yours. I have heard that you spend most of your time trying to help others and I thought that it would be only fair to see if I couldn’t help you. Why should you have all the fun of giving? You know that is really the greatest fun in the world.’

Father Udo nodded. The prince certainly had a way of putting a man at his ease.

‘So you have found that out, too,’ he replied. ‘Then you know what a fraud I am, what selfish pleasure I get from little acts of what men call kindness.’

The merry crow’s-feet about the prince’s eyes deepened.

‘If there were more frauds of your sort,’ he said, ‘this would be a better world. But tell me, is there anything I can do for you?’

Father Udo thought of his problem. If the prince had really been prompted to call by the powers above and if he possessed those miraculous powers of vision which offered the only explanation of his seconding of Count Gregorio’s fib that morning, then would he not be able to advise about the right or wrong of deceiving the duke with fake relics?

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Of course he would. That was doubtless what he was here for.

So Father Udo inclined his head affirmatively.

‘Yes,’ he declared. ‘There is.’

Prince Gustav was pleased. Now he would be able to get the straight of things in Colenna and prepare to act as *deus ex machina* for the troubled ones whom his keen eye had noted.

‘Good!’ he cried. ‘What is it?’

Father Udo wondered how to tell about it. He couldn’t very well blurt right out about relics and suspicious husbands. There must be some more subtle way of beginning. Ah, perhaps this would do —

‘You can advise me about absolute values,’ he ventured.

The princely jaw dropped. He had sensed trouble and gone to relieve it and all that he got was talk of absolute values.

‘What?’ he gasped.

‘Naturally,’ explained the good father, ‘I have studied Plato and Aristotle. And even more naturally I have studied the words and deeds of Our Lord. And I’m in a quandary.’

Prince Gustav sat staring at him.

‘Perhaps you have misunderstood me,’ he said. ‘I thought that you might have some practical problem.’

‘This is very practical,’ Father Udo insisted. ‘The men whom we call philosophers make truth an absolute value. But don’t you think that those great Greeks, and the Romans who followed in their footsteps, neglected an even greater value — that of kindness?’

‘Kindness does not belong to philosophy,’ answered the prince.

Father Udo took to rubbing his tonsure, which was, by the way, more desert than mown.

‘I’m not so sure of that,’ he remarked. ‘Kindness — love, that is — forms the basis of Our Lord’s philosophy. Only people have forgotten that He was the greatest of all philosophers.’

‘Yes,’ owned the prince. ‘I suppose he was.’

‘And it seems to me,’ Father Udo went on, ‘that in adopting the Greek system for our wisdom we have neglected a greater one, or have called it religion and become too mystic about it. Truth may be the basis of reason, but is not love the basis of life? And does not life come before reason?’

Prince Gustav hummed softly to himself. He had a way of doing that when he was taking in something new.

Father Udo continued.

‘You Germans are fond of long words. You like to talk of “the transcendental.” Now, don’t you think that in life love is the great transcendental?’

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It is in Christianity — in the philosophy of Our Lord, that is. “Love God,” He tells us — and since the good is the manifestation of God and is all about Him that we can understand, this means “love the good.” He tells us to love our neighbor — mankind. If this is not part of the Greek system it is because the Greeks could not see far enough. They only got as far as the material and the abstract. Our Lord went clear through to the human.’

‘Hm,’ mused the prince.

From the eagerness of the priest he gleaned that this was not mere talk for talk’s sake. There was something behind it other than a desire to appear learned and to philosophize ponderously. But he knew from his experience with many humans that this other thing would only come out when the philosophical part had been cleared up.

‘Yes,’ he owned after a time, for he could see that Father Udo was looking at him with almost pathetic eagerness to be understood. ‘Perhaps there are two systems. But the truth is part of that good which you call the manifestation of God, isn’t it?’

‘I believe it is,’ Father Udo admitted, ‘but suppose we find a conflict — for in life perfection is only to be aimed at, never attained. Suppose truth prompts one thing and love another, and sup-

pose we cannot find a way to reconcile them. To which should we hold?’

‘Well,’ shrugged the prince, ‘philosophy tells us to hold to the truth.’

He heard Father Udo gulp and knew full well that this was not the answer which the priest desired. In a moment the good father recovered himself and resumed the argument.

‘By philosophy you mean the Greek system, don’t you?’ he urged. ‘You see, even aside from the religious aspect, I think that the Christian system is wiser than the Greek. I’ll grant you that if we had all wisdom we would be able to reconcile the two every time. But we have only a little. Let me give you an instance. Suppose we found that by some little deception we could prevent a great unkindness. What should we do?’

The prince smiled whimsically. He had caught the scent.

‘Why,’ he ventured, ‘we might make up a nice story and tell it from the pulpit on Saint Udo’s day.’

Father Udo gasped. But of course the prince knew. Hadn’t he aided with the deception?

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘we might do that. And by the way, I want to thank you for seconding my friend Count Gregorio. Why did you do it?’

The prince shrugged.

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‘You should not need to ask such a question after making such a plea for kindness as against truth,’ he returned.

Father Udo sat up straight. Here was the answer that he wanted.

‘Then you think that I should carry on?’ he demanded.

‘It may get you into trouble.’

‘Our Lord was crucified.’

‘Not for deception,’ commented the prince.

‘No, but for love.’

Again Prince Gustav hummed, not very musically perhaps, but he hummed. He was wondering whether it would be better to take Father Udo out of all this or to let him work out his own salvation. He decided that there would be no harm in offering, at least, some practical assistance.

‘How would you like to be my chaplain?’ he asked.

For a moment Father Udo was bewildered by the quick change of subject. Then he gasped.

Chaplain to the prince? Slowly there came upon him the realization of what a great change it would make in his position. Safety it would bring him, and ease and travel — a chance to visit sacred places, Rome and the catacombs where the early Christians had suffered. He would see the Pope and the great basilica of the Lateran.

And he would have plenty of paper to write on.
Perhaps some day he should even see the Holy Land, Bethlehem and Nazareth.

Calvary! Would he see Calvary where the Cross had stood? His heart leaped at the thought.

But he would be leaving his poor. And he would be running away from those others who needed him so — the duchess and Bianca and Francesco. And with the duke now in a holier mood could he not save them all by a single further deception?

Oh, the prince could take him away if he would. No one could stop the prince. But for himself, would it not be flight? And how would the flight be construed? What would the duke assume? Wouldn't it mean death for the duchess and something as bad for Bianca? Wouldn't he be leaving his own Calvary, a coward?

The prince was saying something more.

'By taking the post you would do my present chaplain a great favor. He is a German and doesn't like traveling in Italy.'

Oh, it would be glorious! But was this what Heaven wanted? Hadn't the prince been sent to him because of another matter? So thought Father Udo, while the dream of the holy cities faded away.

'Were you thinking of him when you asked me?' he inquired.

The prince shook his head.

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‘No,’ he owned. ‘I was thinking of you.’

There you were. Father Udo felt that it was all right for the prince to think of him, but it was no time for him to think of himself.

‘Then I think that there may be something better for me to do, though I am grateful to you for the offer,’ he said. ‘But before I give a final answer I wish you would answer one question.’

‘Why, certainly,’ smiled the prince.

‘If I could save the life of one person and the happiness of two others by producing the relics of a saint who has never lived, do you think I would be justified in doing so?’

The prince did not answer for a while. And when at last he spoke there was just a touch of sadness in his tone.

‘Your philosophy being what it is,’ he said, ‘I think that you would be justified.’

Father Udo drew a long breath. Heaven had spoken and his mind was made up.

‘Then,’ he responded, ‘I am sorry but I cannot accept your kind proposition.’

He felt a little bit guilty as he made this reply, for he suspected down in his heart that, with the situation at the castle as it was at the moment, he wouldn’t have gone anyhow.

CHAPTER XVI

PRINCE GUSTAV'S visit drew toward its end. He had found little in Colenna to report to the Emperor and much to jot down in his journal. There were pages and pages on Father Udo, whom he visited more than once, comments on his kindness, his simplicity, his Greco-Christian philosophy. And there were more pages upon his practical works of charity, the material for which was gleaned from the reports of the envoy's agents.

It was rather too bad not to mention the false Saint Udo and the priest's concern with the duke's domestic troubles, but the prince could not keep his journal always with him and in a castle like that of Colenna were often prying fingers and peering eyes. He could write that part of it after he had gone on to Pisa.

The prince was an old enough hand at the diplomatic game, though, to make any spies who happened to run through his papers serve his own purposes. In the case of the good father, for instance, he put down a few definite comments which might have a salutary effect if quoted to the duke.

'I am more fortunate than Diogenes,' ran the first, 'for he searched in vain for an honest man, while I have found Father Udo of Saint Holdo's.'

Another said, ‘This Father Udo has done more good and less harm than any one else whom I have ever known. He is indeed a holy man. The Emperor must be told of him.’

That reference to the Emperor had its merits.

And again, ‘I have offered to make Father Udo my chaplain in place of poor Father Wilhelm, who cannot abide macaroni. But the devoted priest has declined to leave his work among the poor and needy. And since I cannot have this wise and worthy man with me I must recommend him to the duke.’

And recommend him he did, for fear the notes, which he was careful not to hide, might not be read — an unnecessary precaution, perhaps, since the duke knew of them almost before the ink was dry.

‘Are you personally acquainted with that Father Udo who preached the other day?’ he asked one afternoon as they sat together over a bottle of chianti.

He was very casual about it and his round face was almost childish in its guilelessness. But he was watching, and he saw the duke’s countenance cloud.

The other was aware that he was being observed and not unmindful of his failing of a facial expression that often betrayed his emotions. And he, too, had recourse to subtle ways.

‘Yes, your highness,’ he replied. ‘I know him.

He shamed me once and though I'll acknowledge that I deserved it the thought of him grieves me. There are those who accuse him of being unruly and deceitful, but I am now convinced that they are wrong.'

Prince Gustav was pleased. Perhaps his fears for the priest were unfounded.

'They are indeed,' he declared. 'It is my business to root out unruliness and unmask deceit, and I may say that I have had some success at it.'

He let his calm gaze rest full upon the other as he went on, 'And if I know where they are, I know where they are not. Father Udo is a man of rare goodness. I think you would do well to cultivate him.'

The duke nodded.

'You may count on me to do it,' he said.

'Good,' smiled the prince. 'I commend him to your care.'

He wished that he might stay longer in Colenna. The duke's friendly attitude might be hopeful or it might be ominous. You couldn't always find out about such things in a single interview, or two, or three. Of course he had noted that his host was inclined to be quite pious these days, but he mistrusted piety. It might cloak quite as many sins as charity ever covered.

But he had already tarried too long in Colenna. Early to-morrow morning he must go to Pisa, and to-night there would be a great reception in the castle; strange that a farewell function should be called a reception. Now he had better make a final call upon Father Udo and assure him that he would come directly back from Pisa for a short stop there, asking him to think about joining his party at that time.

He called at the abbey, where he found the priest in the library, writing away.

‘I’ve come to say good-bye, Father,’ he said.

Father Udo rose and clasped his hand.

‘God speed, Prince Gustav,’ he murmured, and in his voice, his look, and his firm grip was much gratitude.

‘I am coming back this way,’ the prince went on, ‘and I hope that at that time you may consider my offer to join my party more favorably.’

The priest’s face lighted up. He really wanted to go, but he could not till the duchess was out of danger. Perhaps by the time of his benefactor’s return, he could finish the test of the duchess’s probity. Then it would be a different story.

But how about Julia and her threat to Bianca? That had been worrying him much of late. With reasonable care Bianca might ward it off in the day-time. But to-night there was to be that gathering

in honor of the prince and her presence had doubtless been commanded. Balked once, the duke's daughter might take care not to be balked again, and though Francesco's sword might be quick as lightning, it could not avail against the swords of too many foes.

'I might find it possible to join you then,' he told the prince. 'And in the mean time there is something that you might do for me.'

'Why, surely,' declared the other.

'I believe that the duke is a different man these days,' Father Udo explained. 'But I have no reason to hold the same opinion about his daughter. She is insanely jealous of a certain young countess, Bianca Baldini, who lives in the castle which you must have noticed on the hill across the valley. Countess Bianca has doubtless been summoned to the reception to-night.'

'Doubtless,' the prince agreed.

'And going and coming she may be in danger. Swords in the dark, you know.'

The prince nodded.

'I don't think I'd worry about it if I were you,' he suggested.

'But ——'

'I'm sure she will be all right,' the prince insisted. 'An attack upon one bidden to this reception would be an offense against the Emperor him-

self, and even the duke's daughter could not escape its punishment. I can promise you that the Countess Baldini will not be harmed.'

'Oh,' cried Father Udo, 'you don't know Julia!'

'My good friend,' Prince Gustav said very quietly, 'you don't know me.'

Again he shook Father Udo's hand.

'Now farewell,' said he, 'and remember, I need a chaplain.'

Leaving the puzzled and not too reassured priest to gaze after him, he went back to the castle. Regaining his room he sat down at his writing-table. He was worrying over Father Udo.

Little was likely to happen during his absence — two weeks would do all his work in Pisa — but you could never tell. It might be well to make a final entry in his journal, something good and strong, so that if the duke really did mean mischief he would hear of it from his spies and be warned.

A bluff, perhaps, but —

Poising his quill he thought for a moment, then dipped it and thought again. At last he wrote.

'I become more and more interested in this saintly man, Father Udo. I should hate to have anything untoward happen to him, for his possibilities for good seem limitless. The duke has promised to cultivate him, so it is well, for though some of his advisors may counsel him badly, the

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duke is a man of his word and I am sure that he will protect my friend.

'Heaven would certainly strike any one who would harm the good priest. And if Heaven and the duke should fail me I could always call upon the Emperor. It is comforting to have our Christian ruler stand behind one as he stands behind me, for he has told me that if I should ever need help the whole army of Northern Italy is mine for the asking.'

He left the journal open upon the table.

CHAPTER XVII

THE red sun dipped down to a smoky horizon, seemed to pause for a moment on the edge of the infinite, then took its final plunge. Orange and umber streaked the sky line and swept out toward mid-heaven across a background of greenish blue. The poplar leaves stirred with evening's breath. Cool and white and serene, the moon came over the eastern hill to smile on a world that sighed with relief at the passing of day.

Amid the chorus of tiny things of the night, cicadas and piping frogs and little owls, Francesco rode up to the gate of Castle Baldini. His stallion's black coat shone like the silk of the caparison that covered neck and forequarters, and the rider himself wore a gorgeous cloak of azure whereon were worked the arms of his father's house.

He wore a sword, too, whose jeweled hilt gleamed now and then at his side as the folds of the cloak swung back and forth. He had chosen that sword as carefully as ever man picked out arms for an occasion. It had all the appearance of a richly ornamented toy, but beneath its ornate scabbard lurked a blade wafer thin, balanced as delicately as an alchemist's scale, keen as a scalpel, and strong as the club of Hercules. For one did not forget the incident of a certain morning on the highroad.

Indeed, had not the invitation of the Duke of Colenna held all the force of a command, neither he nor Bianca would have gone to the castle that night.

Of course Francesco expected no trouble at the castle itself, but coming and going through the night almost anything could happen. There would be a moon, thank Heaven, but even so there was great danger. Hence the care with the sword, and hence, too, the young man's choice of grooms, for the cavalier who attended him was no downy-cheeked youth, but a bronzed, long-sinewed fellow who had seen a dozen campaigns.

Bianca's gate was guarded now. It had been ever since the day when Julia first showed her claws. And from sunset to sunrise it was bolted as well. But at Francesco's approach it swung open, while the armed retainers of his lady stood and saluted.

Dismounting before the door of the château itself, Francesco threw his bridle to his groom and went through the broad low door to the airy reception hall. A moment and she came, a vision of loveliness in close-fitting white tunic and blazoned cote-hardie of blue, her high headdress making her seem even taller and more slender than was wont, the tight, silken sleeves of her tunic not detracting one jot from the charm of her supple arms.

He looked and gasped, feeling shabby and ordinary in her presence, despite the splendor of his own costume. As she held out her hand, he marveled at the long, lily fingers, and when he took it he marveled again that a thing so ethereal could be so vibrant. Lover-like, he always discovered new beauties about his lady and new charm to the old beauties.

Many things he wanted to say, so many that all could not be said, and he choked with the emotion of them. So he stood silent, strangely affrighted.

He lifted her hand to his lips. In his heart he knew that this was more than courtesy; it was homage. And she, too, knew it.

'I am glad that you are here,' she told him.

He found voice.

'And I am glad,' he said. 'Most of all I am glad that you are glad.'

Stupid! What was he talking about?

'You love danger, don't you?' she smiled.

'When danger means you.'

Then he dragged himself from his enchantment, for there was the road to consider and it was well to be matter of fact about that.

'But I don't like danger *for* you,' he declared, 'and we will do well to be careful. Dark forces work best in the dark hours.'

Gravely she inclined her head.

'I am riding my best horse,' she assured him, 'and very lightly caparisoned. But I'll have to forego mounting like a man. My gown, you know.'

She looked down at the splendor of her costume, and he understood as well as a man could.

'But don't worry,' she went on. 'Even sidewise I can sit my saddle well enough.'

'Your groom?' he asked.

'I have taken your advice. He served as my father's page and when scarce more than an infant he learned the temper of steel.'

He laughed.

'Good,' he declared. 'Mine has been through half a dozen battles with me.'

Despite his laugh he was nervous, but to give her an ease which he could not himself feel he continued, 'Oh, I don't really think that we have anything to fear, but we would be foolish if we did not take precautions.'

She donned her cloak and they went out to the quiet courtyard where her horse now stood in readiness beside his. He helped her into the saddle, not because she needed help any more than he but because he wanted to, then swung into his own and they were off.

They passed the gate and emerged into the road. Scanning the countryside Francesco examined the shadow of each wall and tree, then looked beyond

for other spots where danger might lurk. He cast a glance over his shoulder at the grove where it had lurked before.

Did he see horsemen there? Pooh; two ambuses would not be laid in the same spot, and the grove was well behind them! But did he not see horsemen?

On they cantered. Again he looked back and something cold seized at his heart. A party of men, riding by twos, was keeping pace with them back there.

He signaled with his head to his groom. The campaigner turned and looked, then put his hand on his sword hilt and leaned over to whisper to Bianca's retainer.

Francesco turned to his lady.

'Promise me one thing,' he said as casually as he might.

'What is it?'

'Promise first,' he smiled, 'and learn afterwards. Surely you can trust me to be reasonable.'

'Perhaps,' she returned, 'but one who tries always to keep her word does well to know what she is promising.'

'Well,' he lied, 'I don't think that we shall have any trouble to-night, but if we should I want you to ride for your life while I fight for it.'

She shook her head.

‘Francesco,’ she said. ‘I can indeed trust you, but not to be reasonable.’

The cavalcade behind held its distance, a hundred yards or so. The city drew nearer. Now they were between high walls on the slope that led down to the river. There was a grove at the other end, where the road turned, and this was the place which Francesco feared most.

His glance sought to penetrate the shadows there? Were those men and horses, those darker shadows among the trees? What was that thing that glinted for an instant in a chance ray of moonlight? A sword being drawn from the scabbard?

Danger ahead. Danger behind. And a wall hemming them in on each side.

A horse whinnied down there. Another glint among the poplars.

‘Did you see that?’ he whispered.

She nodded.

‘Perhaps we had better turn back,’ she ventured.

‘Look behind you,’ he directed.

She looked and gasped. Her eyes sought his, questioning.

He was thinking hard, but all that came to him was fury with himself for having led her into this trap.

‘What shall we do?’ she asked.

He drew his sword.

‘Since the wood is on the right side of the road,’ he said, ‘your groom and my groom and I will make a screen for you. Take my left.’

He reined in.

‘Eugenio,’ he ordered his groom, ‘take the lead. I will ride beside the lady. And your comrade will bring up the rear. There is trouble waiting for us in that grove down there.’

The grooms whipped out their weapons and took their places.

‘We must make a running fight,’ Francesco directed. ‘Our whole object is to get by the ambush and then ride for our lives. All right. Go ahead.’

The distance between them and the band behind had been cut in half by now. Closer, but obscured by the wall’s shadow, into which they had but at this moment fled, they took on that added hideousness which belongs to dreaded things half seen. There could be no waiting.

‘Go!’ cried Francesco.

The little party struck spur. Down the short space that separated them from the ambush they dashed, and as they neared the trees the enemy plunged forth.

A torrent of horsemen. Swords in the moonlight. The thud of hoofs in the soft dirt by the roadside.

‘On! On!’ Francesco urged.

But they were before him, a knot of them block-

ing the way. He saw Eugenio's horse rear as the groom's blade engaged those of three others at once. Then they were upon him too.

A fellow on a white horse. A slash. A parry. Francesco shot his blade into the shadowy patch that was his face. One down.

Another in his place. Ah, under the arm. See him topple.

Two riderless horses shut him off from the oncoming crowd. But what chance? A dozen, even more, to three. Damn that Julia!

They had dragged the screening horses away now. And that fellow out in front. He had crossed over, was coming up on the left.

Francesco's heart went cold. He was in his own way. Couldn't reach him. Here he came. The steel. Bianca's breast. Oh, good boy, Eugenio! Well slashed!

For Eugenio had reached over and cut the man down as he neared his victim. Now he swung his horse around to block that passage on his left, and Bianca's groom dropped across the rear till they made a triangle about their charge.

But what hope? Look at them come!

An ugly devil, that one in the sallet. Ah, feel that point! Not paid? Well, come back and feel it again.

Two swords at once. Three. Francesco's wrist

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began to tire, to lose its suppleness. He had been fencing, parrying, then striking like an adder. But they kept slashing away at him, wearing him down.

They were wary, though; careful lest the lightning stroke that had paid comrade after comrade should reach them. And back behind the rest a thick-set fellow who seemed to be their leader bawled shame on them:

'Go on in, cowards! There are but three. Go on, or I strike you down.'

The circle surging inward. Tightening, till the only thing that saved the defenders was the closeness of the pack about them.

They're in each other's way. But it can't last. Why hadn't he told the duke? They said that the old fellow was turning religious, too. Too late now, though. There! How do you like the feel of Spanish steel?

That groom of Bianca's isn't any woman with a sword. See him pay that ugly brute! Here come those fellows from behind. Oh, God!

Full tilt the cavalcade that had followed them was dashing into the fray. Saint Michael, they were striking down their own men!

Thundering hoofs. Steel ringing upon steel, sending sparks flying. Horses down. Riders down. Cut and thrust. But the ring is cleared. The triangle within is free and the defenders of but a mo-

ment ago are now spectators of another fight, as unequal and even shorter.

Dazed by the sudden turn Francesco sat motionless. Who the devil were these fellows who had followed them and now paid off or put to flight the assassins of the shadows?

Here came their leader now, breathing hard, grinning beneath his visorless basinet.

'Pardon, Messer Francesco da Ponte,' he apologized, 'if we are a trifle tardy. It was partly your fault for trying to give us the slip.'

Francesco peered unbelievingly at him.

'Haussermann!' he cried. 'Where in the world did you come from?'

The captain of the prince's bodyguard grinned even harder than before.

'From a clump of trees opposite your lady's castle.' he returned. 'We had a devil of a time getting in there without being noticed, too. Had to come up on the other side of the hill.'

'But — I don't understand. How did you come to be there at all?'

Haussermann had his orders not to talk, and the fact was that he could explain very little even if he would. The prince had given him a certain task, that of escorting a certain countess to the reception. He was to take plenty of men and be prepared for trouble, and in case anything happened or

any questions were asked he was to keep his mouth shut, knowing that the prince would stand behind him.

'Why, you see,' he smiled, 'we were out picking daisies, and it got hot and we went into the wood to cool off. Then when night came on we were afraid to go home till we saw you come along. Then we kept close to you for safety's sake. Any wounds?'

Each of the defenders denied having received so much as a scratch, and if Eugenio had a place on his sword arm that smarted as though it had been touched by steel and Bianca's groom felt a tiny trickle somewhere above the hip they were little things not to be mentioned before other fighting men or before a lady. Francesco himself had really come through unwounded, and Bianca, sheltered by the other three, had not suffered even the disarrangement of her cloak.

'Well, if nobody is hurt,' suggested Captain Haussermann, 'you'd better be getting on to your party. This isn't a very nice place at this moment.'

For there were dark objects huddled here and there on the ground where they had fallen, very still in the moonlight.

Bianca shuddered and Francesco nodded, touching her tenderly upon the arm.

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‘Come on, dear,’ he said. ‘They deserved what they got.’

For a moment she was silent. Then she flared up.

‘Perhaps. But the one who deserves it most gets nothing. Come. We’ll strut around her hall. We’ll laugh in her face.’

She turned to Haussermann.

‘Whatever was your reason for defending us,’ she said, ‘we are grateful to you. And we’ll try to show our gratitude by asking no questions.’

Haussermann saluted.

‘That is the kindest thing you could do,’ he replied. ‘And if you don’t mind we’ll follow you right to the castle gate. I expect that your troubles are over for the evening, for we have dispersed this crowd rather thoroughly. But should you want an escort on your way back speak to me before you leave the reception hall. I’ll be there.’

He saluted again, whistled in his men, who had been scouring the woods for fugitives, and formed his band in column of twos. Francesco and Bianca, with their grooms, rode on. When they had gone but a little way they heard the guttural command of Captain Haussermann to his men to march.

CHAPTER XVIII

STILL a-thrill with the excitement of the ambush, an excitement which was increased by the mystery of their rescue, Bianca and Francesco entered the great hall of the castle. Like most humans who have felt the touch of tense moments and have wrestled, in the full power of their youth, against destruction, beating destruction back, they were transfigured by this experience just past. Bianca, her cheeks glowing, her eyes a-sparkle, seemed visibly more stately than before and Francesco taller and broader of shoulder.

The élite of Colenna turned to gaze on them, and even the dullest stirred at the sight of the girl, while her escort caused many a sigh behind a dainty fan.

Prince Gustav forgot the discomfort of his formal clothes as he viewed them. Who could this dashing couple be? He turned to the duke.

'Those two over there,' he asked, 'who are they?'

Duke Rufio was watching them. Indeed, he was thinking, this girl was beautiful. The young man was handsome, too. Too damned handsome. Something would have to be done about him, and quickly. Too bad, but he was likely to become almost as much of an embarrassment as the duchess.

'The lady is the Countess Baldini,' he said as

disinterestedly as he might. ‘You must have seen her castle across the valley.’

So? The prince raised his eyebrows. He nodded.

‘She is very charming,’ he declared. ‘There is a certain dash about her. Ah, these young people —’

Youth; time of the opened flower, with its soft colors and its rare texture and its subtle perfume. Fire in the veins, a firm step, and the eye turned eagerly toward the to-be. Old age might be wiser, more honored, more exalted; yes, old age might have its compensations, but when we begin to think of compensations we admit that things are not as we would have them.

Thus thought Prince Gustav as he watched Bianca. What a daughter to have! What a friend! No wonder Father Udo was interested in her safe conduct to and from the castle!

The prince smiled wistfully as he fingered his chin. Why, perhaps this very night he was doing this vibrant creature a service, thanks to the priest at Saint Holdo’s. It was worth while sending a bodyguard for her.

He envied her escort with a friendly sort of envy. The young man was quite as dashing as the girl. He could understand why they took to each other. So often one couldn’t that it was a delight to see such a pair. The fellow was so straight, yet

seemed so wiry! He was so clean of feature and of limb!

‘And her companion?’ asked the prince.

The duke controlled his features very well. He was learning to play a part, thanks to his show of piety during the past few days.

‘Francesco da Ponte,’ he said.

That told Prince Gustav but little.

‘His father,’ the duke went on, ‘is that Count Gregorio whom I presented to you one day at the cathedral.’

The prince did not remind his host that he had neglected to present the count. One didn’t do that sort of thing. Besides, he was still dreaming of youth.

He glanced at Julia, sitting on a dais beside the duchess. How moody she seemed as she watched those other two! She would have looked well with tigers crouched about her feet.

She had youth, too, and beauty. But youth can be selfish and cruel, not so tyrannical as old age, perhaps, but quite as ruthless. Could she be the source of that danger to the young Countess Baldini which Father Udo had been so anxious to avert? From the look upon her face he could understand how she might be.

What a life the poor duchess must lead, with such a step-daughter and such a husband! His

heart went out to her. God, how lonely she must be! And if she had sinned Heaven forgive her, for there was no relief in that!

And Bianca and Francesco, moving about among the guests of the duke, their thoughts were more tumultuous. They knew that they were being watched, and by eyes less kindly than those of the prince, so they tried to hide their emotions, to mask from the world the thrill that seized them when they looked at each other. But how mask such feelings? Did not the heart of each beat wildly when their hands brushed together with a seemingly accidental touch? Did not that touch, expressing the emotion pent up within them, hold all the passion of a wild embrace?

Lurking menace but added fuel to the fires of desire.

Banal talk. Boring people. A curbed horse chafing at the bit! An hour of this, with Francesco's mind wandering strangely to the snatch of song which he had started out there by her castle in the early morning and had never finished —

‘Then it’s saddles for two in the morning.
We’ll early be up and away.
For I’m coming for you in the morning —’

What then? He had the music for this and more, for did not Bianca prompt music? But he was no

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poet. Only when the mists lay in gray streaks along the hills, before sunrise — Ah —

When hills are streaked with gray.

Not poetry, no, but it fitted the tune which ran in his head.

Sidelong he glanced at her, and trembled. He must be alone with her!

‘Bianca,’ he whispered. ‘There is a balcony — over the courtyard —’

Her hand pressed his. They made their way through the buzzing crowd, passed a pair of heavy curtains, went down a hall and turned through another pair of curtains. Then they emerged beneath the stars to a balcony, heavily draped with velvet, one great piece of which reached, fold on fold, even to the paving stones below.

They did not know that Julia left her place beside the duchess as soon as they were gone, nor could they see the duke beckon to Martin or hear him whisper in his ear.

Warm, scented breezes wandering in from flowery hillsides that slept lightly under a great moon. Two lovers, forgetful of the stuffy practicality of day and the lurking dangers of night.

‘Bianca,’ murmured Francesco.

Her smooth, slender hand lay in his. She trembled, but he knew that it was not with fear.

‘Yes, dear,’ she whispered.

‘Bianca, do you feel the soft caress of the breeze? Many nights I have felt such breezes and dreamed of you. I call them winds of love.’

‘Francesco.’

Her cheek was against his shoulder. His arm stole about her waist. Firm yet delicate, ethereal yet real she felt as her heart beat against him.

‘Bianca, why should we wait? Why should we let fear, which is a hideous thing, stifle love, which is a beautiful thing?’

She did not move.

‘Look at the moon, Francesco,’ she breathed. ‘It paints the whole land with silver. Even the city, dreaming there, is a thing of beauty.’

‘It paints the land with love!’ he cried. ‘And beauty is a dream of you.’

He held her close to him. Her head was thrown back a little, and her eyes, half closed, bespoke contentment — and forgetfulness.

‘Oh,’ he sighed, ‘I love you.’

The moonlight touched her face. Her lips were parted and her breath passed them, deep and tense.

‘And I love you, Francesco.’

Her whisper ended in a little gasp as he kissed her. Then, as weakness seemed to enfold her, she kissed him back.

Scent of lilacs. The song of the nightingale.

Delicious faintness, with his arms about her, his lips upon hers.

Beyond the curtains a sullen darkly pallid woman gripping a dagger. It would be so easy! A spring. A swift, sure stroke at the back of that blazoned cote-hardie, and red blood would flow.

‘Oh, I love you so.’

Julia’s left hand sought the curtain. She crouched like a panther.

A hard grip upon her arm arrested her. Starting back she looked into the sharp eyes of Martin. He shook his head, and his hand did not relax.

The hall behind him was full of men-at-arms, grim fellows with swords and pikes and halberds. Julia glanced from them to Martin, then to the curtains.

He nodded. She understood.

‘Both of them, then,’ she hissed. ‘Life for life.’

With his free hand Martin beckoned the soldiers closer.

‘I demand it!’ cried Julia. ‘If you hadn’t come, I’d have had her blood on my dagger by now. Life for life!’

Martin clapped his hand over her mouth, but too late. From the balcony came a startled gasp, then the zip of a sword leaving its scabbard.

‘At him,’ he snapped, as he dragged Julia aside. ‘But spare the lady.’

She struck at him with the dagger, but he held her.

'Damn you,' she panted, striking again, 'if you hadn't come I'd have finished her by now.'

Again she stabbed at him, but he caught her wrist as the first pikeman plunged through the curtains.

Francesco, at bay on the balcony, met the fellow with a quick thrust. Clapping his hand to his throat the attacker staggered back to the hall. The first stroke had gone home.

The lovers stood with their backs to the balcony rail, Bianca pale as the moonlight, Francesco with countenance like a thundercloud.

'Come on,' cried he.

The point of a halberd appeared between the curtains. Its owner shoved forward. Another thrust and a gurgling cry.

'Two!' cried Francesco as the halberd clattered to the floor.

A swift glance about him. With his left hand he reached back and tugged at the hanging on the rail. It was fastened securely.

'Can you slide down?' he whispered.

'I can try.'

'Then go. I'll hold them.'

'But ——'

'Quick! I'll come as soon as you're down. Go!'

No longer were his the soft tones of love. He was commanding now. A second she hesitated, then seized his free hand and kissed it.

Over the rail she climbed, while Francesco stood, blade in readiness for the next comer. He heard the rustle of her descent above the mutter of voices beyond the drapes. Her voice came up from below.

‘Come, dearest.’

Sheathing his sword Francesco half slid, half vaulted to her side. He wondered, during the second of his descent, at the bravery and strength of this loved one of his who had taken that dangerous drop so surely. But she showed him more wonders in that moment.

The sentry from across the court came running up, pike in hand. As Francesco’s feet struck the ground the man lunged, and it was Bianca who sprang at him, causing his thrust to go wild.

Francesco’s sword was out again in a trice. It caught the pike upon the second thrust, driving it aside. A step forward and Francesco, inside the point’s range, struck a single blow. Nor was there need for more.

As the sentry’s knees collapsed under him and he fell, clutching his breast, Francesco seized Bianca’s wrist and together they darted across the yard to melt into the shadow beyond. As they

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dashed for the stables they heard Martin's command up there beyond the balcony:

‘Tear down the damned drapes!’

In a moment more they were in the stables, where startled grooms roused themselves to bring their horses. Quickly they mounted, leaving the men standing there to stare after them as they spurred away across the flags to the main gate.

There was just a chance that they could pass unchallenged. This attack had doubtless been conceived on the spur of the moment. That poor sentry fellow back there had not been warned of it or he would have been on the spot sooner. At any rate they must run for it.

Hoofs striking sparks from the pavement. The cry of a sentinel —

‘Who goes?’

‘The Emperor’s courier,’ shouted Francesco, never slackening. ‘Clear the gate.’

And since the Emperor’s envoy was within the man at arms stood back. The fugitives raced out just as Martin’s band came pouring into the court.

CHAPTER XIX

FOR a while they rode madly down the winding street, the clatter of their passing rousing sleepy townsmen from their slumbers to wonder at the haste of these coursers of the night. Then, as the excitement of the fight wore off and they realized that no one was yet in pursuit, they slackened their pace.

'I think I have been a fool,' Francesco observed.

'A very noble fool,' Bianca replied, as her horse picked its way along beside his. 'But what have you done wrong?'

'I think that instead of fleeing from the castle yard we should have gone back to the banquet hall.'

Bianca shook her head.

'I don't,' she declared.

'We would have been safe there, for the moment at least,' Francesco insisted.

'Perhaps,' she owned, 'but look at me. My headdress is gone. And oh, my cote-hardie! I couldn't have gone in there looking like this.'

He laughed.

'You are truly a woman!'

'And the safety of the moment is not worth much,' she went on.

‘We would have had an escort home,’ he reminded her.

‘We dare not go home,’ she said.

She was right. To-morrow anything might happen. To tarry was to invite destruction. His house was but a city mansion and Castle Baldini was not built to withstand a siege.

‘I suppose not,’ he agreed. ‘There’s no safety for us in Colenna. We must get out of here before the gates are closed on us.’

‘And then where shall we go?’ she asked.

He drew a long breath and brought his horse so close to hers that they touched.

‘Along the King’s Highway to its end,’ he whispered.

Taking her hand in his he pressed it to his lips.

‘Will you?’ he asked.

She nodded, many times and hard.

‘Of course it will be hard for you,’ he said. ‘And there will be danger.’

Her eyes were upon him, wistfully tender, as she paraphrased something which she held in her heart.

‘Danger? What is life but danger? And if love, too, can be danger —’

She broke off.

‘You see, I’ve learned my lesson,’ she trilled. ‘And really, Francesco, there is glory in being two against the world.’

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He patted her shoulder. Then putting his arm around her he pulled her toward him and kissed her tenderly.

They came to the gate whose guards knew Francesco so well from his rides in the dawn, and in a moment they were through it and out on the road to the world.

They did not turn toward Castle Baldini but off in the other direction where no ambush might be laid.

'We can reach Pisa by sunrise,' said Francesco as they cantered along between moon-filled meadows. 'And in the morning we'll be married.'

Her eyes smiled at him.

Silence and contentment descended upon them as they journeyed toward morning. And in the enchantment of it Francesco hummed his song, the words slowly forming themselves to the regular hoofbeats of their steeds, till at last it was a whole, and he sang, with heart a-throb.

'Then it's saddles for two in the morning.
We'll early be up and away.
For I'm coming for you in the morning
When hills are streaked with gray.
But our jaunt won't be through in the morning
Nor yet at the close of day,
For side by side through the night we will ride
To the end of the King's Highway.'

CHAPTER XX

SLEEPLESS with rage, Duke Rufio paced the floor all night. Martin had bungled! Did the fellow ever do anything else? His advice might be good but for direct action he was hopeless. And that Julia, his own daughter — damn her, she had ruined everything with her stupid jealousy.

The time between the report of the crestfallen Martin and the final departure of the guests was the worst part of the nightmare. To play host to Prince Gustav, smiling as if nothing had happened while all the time awaiting reports from the parties he had sent out in search of the lovers, was enough to tax the soul of a saint, and for all his show of piety the duke did not confuse himself with one of these.

He had warned all those connected with the affair to remain silent about it under pain of death, sending the order out by Martin, who, in the duke's enforced absence, took charge of the pursuit. And as soon as the guests were gone and the prince had retired he sent for Julia.

She refused to come.

He went to her boudoir, found it locked, and proceeded to break down the door. She let him do it and met him within, pale and flashing eyed.

‘How now?’ he cried. ‘Murderess!’

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‘Assassin,’ she sneered.

He strode forward as though to seize her by the throat, but she did not flinch.

‘You spoiled my plan,’ he fumed.

‘And you spoiled mine,’ she retorted.

‘You’ll suffer for this!’

‘Oh, no, dear father,’ she jeered. ‘You have so many irons in the fire that one more would put the fat in it. Dare you kill me?’

‘Kill you!’ he thundered. ‘Killing is too good for you.’

‘So you dare not,’ she laughed. ‘Or at any rate you will not. Then talk not of punishing me, for I know too much of certain plots of yours. A word to Father Udo would do something to thwart you. A note to the Emperor or to the Pope and where would you be?’

‘You defy me?’ he roared.

‘No, father,’ she purred. ‘I simply want you to come to reason. We have each stepped on the other’s toes. We should be quits.’

She had decided when the lovers escaped that things were beyond her for the present. Bianca was out of her reach, Francesco irretrievably lost. Had she been actuated more by love and less by jealousy, this might have been a blow scarce to be endured. But after all, Francesco meant only a little to her, something to stir her rage toward a

woman of whom she had always been jealous anyhow. Now she was ready for a trade.

‘You have lost your Bianca, as I have lost my Francesco,’ she went on. ‘Should we therefore forget that there is something else for which we are working?’

‘I have not lost her yet!’ he objected.

‘Oh, yes, you have,’ she insisted. ‘Between us we have driven them into each other’s arms and out of the duchy. Would you care to make a wager on it?’

The duke did not answer. He feared that she was right. But suppose they had really run away to be married. That could be annulled. Oh, not by the Church, of course, but what a council of cardinals would not do an assassin could do very handily. Till then it would indeed be well to work together with his daughter.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘Never mind the wager. We’ll work for this other thing.’

‘On one condition,’ she smiled.

‘What?’

‘That when you are rid of this duchess of yours I am to be mistress here.’

He shrugged. That was easy. She would be anyhow till such time as he might find another duchess; Bianca or —

‘Agreed,’ he returned.

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‘And her jewels are to be mine,’ she continued.
‘Not hoarded for some other captive of yours.’

He stiffened. Was this his daughter, this person who had thwarted him and was now bargaining like a pawnbroker?

‘Unnatural wench!’ he hissed.

‘I am but what I am,’ she returned. ‘Such as you see me I am what my blood has made me. I am Duke Rufio’s child and not afraid to stake my life for that which I want. Do I get it or do you kill me to keep my mouth shut?’

‘There is the dungeon,’ he warned her.

‘Walls have lips as well as ears,’ she countered.
‘Come, father, what are a few baubles to you?
Was it not I who hatched the plot which you hope
will free you of your duchess?’

The duke stood irresolute. He had not come here to promise jewelry to his daughter. Quite the contrary. But despite his anger he was not willing to order her death. His ruthlessness stopped with his only child. Yet he did fear her. And after all, what were the duchess’s rings and ropes of pearls to him. He had given her much and she had scarce thanked him. It served her right to hand them on to some one else even before she was out of the way.

But his authority. How about his authority? Still — there was much at stake.

‘What are the jewels to me?’ he asked. ‘Why should you not have them? I can’t wear them.’

Julia clapped her hands.

‘Good!’ she cried. ‘And I’ll help you all I can.’

She flung her arms about his neck and kissed him.

‘To-morrow, after the prince has gone, we must send for Father Udo,’ she went on.

Standing before her tall mirror she admired herself, posing now this way, now that.

‘That gorgeous diamond here. And the pearls of India —’

She saw herself decked like a barbarous Oriental queen. Her father stood for a moment, scowling, then shrugged and left the room.

Never had he felt so crestfallen. Had things come to such a pass that he could not even reprove his own daughter without being the loser by it? Was he to be denied everything that he wanted and saddled with everything that he did not want? And he a duke, looked up to as ruler of this city and the country for leagues about.

Of course it was his own fault. He should not have lost his temper last night. Martin had advised against killing Francesco there and then and had only undertaken the job under protest. For it would have given his hand away completely, perhaps even preventing a further move against the duchess.

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And with Prince Gustav here — Yes, it had been very silly. And it was lucky that no one knew about it. Those two were in flight. They must be. They would be fools to tarry. And after all, they couldn't prove his complicity even if they were to complain to the Emperor or to the prince.

That damned pompous German! His visit had been a disaster. What business had he running about poking his nose into other people's affairs anyhow? Well, he would be gone at sunrise, with all his heralds and scribes and his *fol de rol*. And then —

First of all that priest would be dragged to the castle and — and — Oh, the devil, you had to go easy with him. The prince seemed to have taken him right to his heart. And the Emperor and the Pope, they had to be considered, too. A fine time, this, for them to be getting together!

Yes, you had to go easy with Father Udo — at first. To begin with you'd ask for the relics. And according to Martin, who had called at the abbey half a dozen times, the poor fool would produce them on demand now. Martin wasn't so bad for diplomatic jobs, even though he was hopeless at direct action.

Workmen had now completed a side altar in the chapel. It was to be Saint Udo's altar — a symbol of ducal good faith. But before the bones should

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be placed there they'd have to spend some time on the high altar, and Father Udo would have to say mass there. Then he'd be asked to prove that they were indeed relics of a saint.

The duke would demand a miracle from them. He'd proclaim a day when the blind and lame of the duchy should come to the castle to be cured of their ills by touching them. And if none were cured — as none would be — he'd express doubt of their genuineness. Father Udo would be forced to tell where he got them — put on the rack and —

Ha! There would be few questions about the bones and many about the duchess! But the world would never know that, for the priest would not leave the dungeon alive. Emperor and Pope would hear only of the fool's sacrilege, and despite the things which Prince Gustav might say they would see in it all only zeal for the faith.

Martin wasn't such an idiot after all. Or no! This was Julia's idea, not Martin's. She had balked one of his plots, but perhaps that was a good thing, for he had been too hasty, and this web that she had shown him how to weave about the priest — In some ways she was indeed worthy to be his daughter. And if she wanted the jewels of the duchess, well, why not?

Dawn found him less angry, more eager to begin closing the net, and at sunrise he was able to bid

his noble but unwelcome guest a courteous farewell. Then, when Prince Gustav's company was safely on its way to Pisa he sent for Martin.

His adviser came at his summons, standing nervously before him.

'Martin,' demanded the duke, 'do you always bungle?'

The other bowed.

'I am your grace's adviser,' he murmured. 'Not one of his captains. Last night's plot was not mine. I took charge against my will — and even so your grace's design would have been accomplished had not your house been divided against itself.'

The duke nodded.

'True, Martin,' he owned. 'Moreover, you were right when you warned me against haste. But now that the prince is gone don't you think it time for that priest to produce his relics?'

Martin smiled. He was considerably relieved by his master's show of reason.

'Yes,' he agreed. 'You can act whenever you will.'

'Then go get the fellow now,' cried the duke. 'Tell him to bring his damned bones. Tell him that if he doesn't the mysterious lady whose name he knows only too well will find herself playing with rats in the dungeon.'

Martin bowed again.

'I shall do as you say,' he replied. 'But let me

warn you to continue your show of piety and sweetness, lest he become wary before the trap is sprung.'

The duke grunted.

'Count upon it,' he returned. 'Though I'm sick of this sweetness.'

'Good,' Martin commended him.

He turned to the door, where he paused.

'I'll have him here within an hour,' he said, and was gone.

So Father Udo was summoned, right after mass, to the chapel. He had been ready for this call for some days, having informed Martin one afternoon that by a great piece of good luck he had actually found some relics of the martyr saint, and now when he went along with the duke's adviser a casket containing half a dozen little bones was tucked under one arm. The origin of these remains was no better known to him than to any one else. They might be human and they might not — probably not. Certainly he knew of nothing sacred about them.

He found the duke waiting in the little anteroom where he had cooled his heels that night before going in to dinner. His grace seemed very glad to see him and most anxious about the relics.

'Have you brought the blessed remains of Saint Udo?' he asked.

‘Such of them as I could find,’ bowed the priest, extending the casket.

The duke drew away from the little box of carved wood. He crossed himself.

‘I am not worthy to touch them,’ he murmured. ‘Keep them for the moment. You shall place them with your own hands upon the high altar of the chapel.’

Father Udo paled.

‘But, your grace,’ he stammered, ‘I——’

‘Oh,’ broke in the other, ‘I know that they deserve an altar of their own. And I am having one constructed. Till it is finished we must do the best we can by them. You shall place them on the high altar and to-morrow morning you shall say mass there. Then we will have the test of which Martin has told you.’

The room seemed to revolve slowly about the poor priest. Only by dint of great effort was he able to keep from falling to the floor. What an impasse!

To do as the duke commanded would be very close to sacrilege. And to fail or flinch now that he had gone this far would be even worse, for it would in effect confirm the duke’s suspicions of his duchess and bring disaster upon all those whom he sought to protect.

Even now he had hesitated over long. The duke

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was eyeing him closely. What might he not think?

Father Udo made the sign of the cross.

‘Your will is law,’ he said.

They went to the chapel, and there where the sanctuary light burned redly, proclaiming the presence of the Sacred Body, Father Udo bended his knee in token of his unworthiness, mounted the altar steps and deposited the casket beneath the Holy of Holies.

Would God forgive? It was for his fellow man, but —

Tottering back to the foot of the steps he knelt, with bowed head, and prayed silently:

‘*Miserere mei Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.*’



CHAPTER XXI

SOMEHOW Father Udo could not bring himself to include the story of those bones in his history of the martyr saint. He had intended to be perfectly honest with himself, making Udo the Martyr go through all the experiences which he himself went through, but when he picked up his quill and dipped it in ink his arm refused to function. Again and again, during the day that passed between his return from the chapel and his going there to say the mass of the test, he tried to go on with his book, and each time gave it up in despair.

Through his mind ran two things, the ‘*De Profundis*’ of the psalmist and the terrible ‘*Dies Irae*.’ All day they gave him no peace and all night no rest, and when he went to the castle on the morrow to perform the holy sacrifice it was with dragging steps, with drawn face and a heavy heart.

To-day he saw the new altar — yesterday he had been unable to see anything — and shuddered at it. It was shockingly simple, like a tomb, which was not entirely inappropriate, for during the persecutions of the first three centuries of Christianity the tombs of martyrs were often used as altars, and for all the fact that he knew his church bore it startled him.

He was tempted to flee, to take his false relics and cast them into the sea. But how could he? He had more than himself to think of.

So he went to the sacristy and donned the vestments of the sacrifice. Then, when the whole company of the castle had assembled, at the duke's order, for the mass he took the sacred instruments and strode somberly out to commence.

'Domine, non sum dignus,' he kept repeating to himself as his lips formed the words of the liturgy. But thank Heaven, to-day it would all be over, the test would be made, and he might, by prayer and penance, atone in some measure for what he had done.

Prayer and penance, for the rest of his life. And might God grant that he had not damned himself. For though he knew that what he did was prompted by one thing alone — love for his fellow man — he found little consolation in the thought.

He was judging himself more harshly than he would have judged another. To some one else in his predicament he would have said that it was impossible that one should damn himself for love of his fellow man, that no just Judge would condemn a man who was willing to give not only his life but even his eternal happiness for others. To himself he said, 'Miserable sinner, what have you done? What are you doing?'

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He gave the last blessing, read the last gospel, and descended from the altar.

‘Now for the test,’ he sighed.

But the test did not come. The duke and Martin sought him out in the sacristy as he was removing his vestments.

‘Father,’ said the former, most apologetically, ‘I hope that you will pardon my skepticism. But some one has whispered to me that the relics which you have placed upon the altar are not genuine.’

Father Udo staggered as though hit. Martin, noting his distress, followed up the duke’s lead.

‘Of course we are sure that they must be,’ he smiled, ‘for we know that you would not commit the terrible sin of playing a hoax on the very altar.’

‘But you will understand that we must investigate,’ pursued Duke Rufio. ‘Time was when it wouldn’t have worried me, but sacred things mean more to me than they once did.’

Standing between them Father Udo felt himself assailed first from one side and then from the other. That their tones were soft and their manner conciliating gave him little comfort. Alas, they were only too right, he only too wrong.

He tried to speak, but could only cough, and Martin took up the conversation where the duke had left off.

‘Of course, Father, you will be able to disprove

the foul calumnies whispered against you. You can doubtless prove that the bones in your coffer are really relics of Saint Udo the Martyr.'

At last Father Udo found voice, hoarse and faint, but audible.

'It would be difficult,' he said.

'But, Father!' cried Martin. 'I don't understand!'

'To prove the authenticity of relics more than two centuries old, yes, more than twice that,' the priest explained, 'could never be easy. Unless, like the true Cross, they perform miracles.'

'Exactly,' declared the duke. 'Yet you expected me to put faith in a test of fidelity made by them. You expected me to believe them miraculous.'

'Pardon, your grace,' bowed Father Udo, 'but it was you who suggested the test, not I.'

'Yes, your grace,' broke in Martin, 'Father Udo is right. You did suggest the test. But of course unless we have faith in the bones we cannot have faith in their verdict. Father Udo has spoken of the true Cross. Cannot these bones be submitted to the same trial?'

'A good idea!' grunted the duke.

'But ——'

Father Udo's objection was submerged in the flow of Martin's words.

'I suggest that your grace set a day, and as soon

as possible, when all the blind and halt of the city shall be bidden to come here to touch the bones and be cured. If some of them really are healed, we shall know that the relics are genuine. If not we shall have to take measures of an unpleasant sort.'

Father Udo stood aghast. Had he sinned, then, to no purpose at all? Was the Socratic ideal of Truth indeed superior to the Christian principle of Love?

'But this is different,' he faltered. 'Not all relics are miraculous.'

'Well,' the duke replied sternly, 'these had better be for your sake. Sacrilege is a thing that I will not tolerate in my dominions. Three days from now we will gather here again and we will summon the sick to be healed, as Martin has suggested. Till then we had better remove the relics from the altar. We'll take care of that, you needn't bother with them. But be back here for the mass of three days from now. Till then, farewell.'

As Father Udo dragged himself away he heard the duke direct Martin to prepare the proclamations at once.

So this was the outcome of it all, he thought as he made his halting way toward the abbey. He had sinned, committed near-sacrilege, lied, and in general made of himself an abomination before the Lord. And all that he had for his pains was his sin.

The duchess was in worse trouble than ever, for with the exposure of his faking must come absolute conviction of her guilt. And he himself was not unlikely to suffer seriously — not that this mattered, for he deserved it and anyhow it was such a small thing beside the collapse of his whole philosophical system!

Yet he had meant well! And he would be damned for it. What was that thing about the road to hell?

He crossed the market place, not returning or even hearing the greetings of townsmen who had come to love his cheery face. And many a person turned to gaze after him in wonder, thinking how old Father Udo had become of late, how old and haggard. Little children, too, who ran up to greet him, stood back as their cheery cries brought no response.

‘What has happened to our Father Udo?’ the people said one to another, as they ceased their chatter and shook their heads gravely.

Count Gregorio chanced to see him across the square and hailed him, but Father Udo did not hear. Whereupon the count started after him, overtaking him halfway to the city gate.

‘Why the long face, old soul-saver?’ he cried as he drew abreast of his friend. ‘One would think that you had gazed on death.’

Father Udo did not raise his head.

'I have,' he murmured. 'Perhaps I have even gazed on hell.'

He chuckled mirthlessly.

'Soul-saver! Ha! I can't even save my own.'

Count Gregorio gasped. He had never seen the good father in such a mood before. Depressed sometimes, yes, but not so close to the blackness of despair.

'What is the matter?' he cried.

Father Udo halted. Here was some one standing by, unable to help, perhaps, but trying to relieve his loneliness; for it had seemed to him that the whole universe must shun him.

He put a hand on the count's arm.

'Old friend,' he said, 'I have a feeling that I shall not be with you long.'

The other's long face wrinkled mirthfully.

'Oh, come!' he laughed. 'Old oaks are stoutest. What you need is a bit of wine — for thy stomach's sake, as the evangelist says. I know the symptoms. Too much bile makes a bitter world.'

Father Udo shook his head.

'No,' he declared, 'my body is well, but my soul is sick. And there are those in high places who seek my life.'

'Like Paul,' returned the count, 'who told the Corinthians, "In stripes above measure, in deaths

often,’ and all which follows. Yet he was alive and well when he wrote it.’

‘Yes, but the danger is not what worries me,’ Father Udo assured him. ‘I am not responsible for what others do to me. But for the things which I do I am — and for the things which I, in my silliness, let happen to my friends.’

He seemed so pathetically lonely, so pitiful in his cleaving to his friend, whose arm he had seized and was holding to like a drowning man, that the count was touched with great tenderness.

‘Let me share this thing, whatever it is,’ he said softly. ‘Tell me all about it — as another tells you in the confessional.’

Father Udo smiled wanly. He pressed the count’s hand.

‘Come to the monastery, old friend,’ he directed, ‘and I’ll tell you as much as I may.’

So they went on to the garden, and as they walked along Father Udo unfolded the tale of his troubles, or so much of it as the secrecy of the confessional permitted him to tell. When it was over the count whistled.

‘Well,’ he breathed, ‘so that is how the land lies! And your story explains some things that have been troubling me, for instance how my son and his dog got wounded on the same day — he would never tell. And it may also explain the sudden departure

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and marriage of my Francesco and the lady Bianca.'

Father Udo pricked up his ears.

'What?' he gasped. 'Francesco and Bianca married?'

'My son did not return from the farewell party in honor of Prince Gustav,' the count explained. 'And to-day I have had the merest note from him saying that they are married and living at a certain address in Pisa, whither I have sent funds.'

A touch of color came back to Father Udo's cheek. Perhaps all was not lost after all. At least two of his charges were out of reach.

'*Te Deum laudamus*,' he murmured. 'But tell them to be wary of knives in the dark. Stay! I'll write and recommend them to Prince Gustav. He is in Pisa now. Let's go to the library.'

He led the way, with the count at his heels. Sitting down at his desk he tore a sheet from a certain manuscript, wherein one Abbot Bombo had written much in praise of himself, and scratched off a line to the prince. He handed it to Count Gregorio.

'This should get your son out of harm's way for a while,' he observed, as the count took it. 'You know, I'm beginning to be doubtful of Duke Rufio's reformation. The writing on his new leaf isn't very convincing.'

The count smiled.

'Already you feel better, don't you?' he remarked. 'A chance to do some one some good is the best medicine in the world for you. Father, you believe in the efficacy of prayer, don't you?'

Father Udo nodded.

'Of course,' he said.

'Then pray for those miracles which you so desire. Personally I don't think you have committed any sacrilege, for I don't attach much importance to rites. Whatever you've done you've done with the idea of doing good, and God likes people like you. Don't let this get the best of you.'

Father Udo sat tracing designs with his finger upon the table that was his desk. Perhaps he was not cast off after all. Perhaps his worst sin was the despair into which he had been plunged — wasn't that the unpardonable sin? And why? Because a despairing person was beyond fighting or pleading. Well, he wouldn't let himself get that far down again if he could help it. He would pray, even as the count suggested, and you couldn't tell, there might be miracles.

If there were he did not care what happened to him after that, for the miracles would prove that his system was right and that Heaven would weigh kindness against sacrilege and find the latter unimportant indeed. Oh, if there would only be miracles!

In the mean time —— Why, he had completely forgotten that to-day he should carry alms to a certain pair of orphans in the city. How slack of him!

'You remind me of my duty, old friend,' he told the count. 'I must not let my own petty troubles make me neglect the poor. I have alms to bear to-day.'

'Then bear your alms,' cried the count, happy to see the change which had come over his friend. 'And come to dine with me this evening.'

'No,' Father Udo declined. 'I'm afraid I should be poor company. I'll eat little till after this test—and none at all then unless Heaven comes to my aid.'

The count was apparently thinking of something very interesting. A little smile flickered across his lips.

'Fasting and alms and prayer,' he breathed. 'If that combination doesn't help you what could? And don't worry, for I think that there will be miracles, all right. You consider me something of a skeptic but —— I know *damned well* that there will be miracles!'

He held out his hand.

'Now good-bye, for I am very busy,' he went on. 'If you need me look me up. Anything I can do for you I will. And remember, there will be miracles.'

When they had shaken hands the count departed. There were several persons whom he wanted to see. And he had a letter to write to his son — a letter asking him to send with all dispatch from Pisa all the people of a certain type whom he could find.

He strode hastily back through the city gate and along the street to the market place. As he reached there he noted that the townsmen were clustered about a herald who had mounted a high block and was unrolling a scroll which he held in his hand. The count paused on the edge of the crowd to listen. The herald read loudly, in a ringing voice:

'Hear ye! Hear ye! His grace the Duke Rufio proclaims that the relics of Saint Udo the Martyr having been found and placed upon the altar of the castle chapel by Father Udo of Saint Holdo's, whose patron saint he is, all those afflicted with ills of the body are bidden come to the chapel on Thursday next at eight of the clock that they may touch the relics and be healed!'

Four times he read it, facing once to each side of the square. And four times Count Gregorio listened, standing there with his hand caressing his chin and little white beard.

When it was all over, when the herald had departed and the people were scattering to their va-

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rious affairs, the count still remained as in a dream.
At last he smiled and nodded.

‘Yes,’ he mused, ‘I think that there will be
miracles.’



CHAPTER XXII

THE duchess spent much time in her room these days, for since Father Udo's memorable sermon she had been nervous and afraid. Of course so long as Prince Gustav remained at the castle, her duties as a hostess had compelled her presence in banquet hall and salon, but now that he was gone and she was relieved of all this she kept to herself.

That something very serious was wrong she had no doubt, and she was quite able to picture the nature of the something. But of what was going on under the surface she had no way of knowing. She would have liked to find out just what had prompted that sermon, but she dared not communicate with Father Udo for fear of her husband's spies and even more of the dark construction which she could be certain he would place upon such a thing.

So she waited, afraid but not remorseful save for the fact that what she had done might cause harm to another. If only she might have definite knowledge of what was in the air. She did not doubt that the bones of Saint Udo were somehow mixed up in it, but how she could not tell, for she was naturally uninformed of the duke's pretended plan to test her virtue by them.

She became sweeter, more thoughtful, more

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kindly as time went on, yet despite all this even her maids seemed to shun her and only remained with her when she gave them express directions to do so, which was not often. She thought that this must be the work of her husband, a hidden way of weakening her by making her realize her aloneness, but in this she was mistaken. The duke was incapable of such finesse, and had it been suggested to Martin he would have discouraged it as premature. But Julia, whose purpose was more cruel than that of her father, who was only interested in terminating what he considered a bad bargain, and whose mind was more keen, had taken it upon herself to harass her young stepmother rival in this manner.

Another woman left alone so much would have sought solace in prayer. So might the duchess had her trouble had any other source than her marriage with the duke — and the infidelity attendant upon it. But about this she was too bitter to pray. She felt that any wrong which she had done was not at all commensurate with that which she had suffered and she was inclined, now that the spiritual support of Father Udo was denied her, to blame Heaven for allowing such injustice.

On the day before that appointed for the healing test she lay alone on her bed, in a brooding fear, when there was a faint rap at her door.

She bade the timid one enter.

The door opened and a woman stood for a moment on the threshold looking at her with eyes that were infinitely sad.

‘What is it?’ asked the duchess.

The other stepped in, closing the door behind her, and crossed the room to throw herself to her knees beside the bed and bury her face in its folds.

‘Forgive me, my mistress,’ she sobbed, ‘and pity me. We are both in trouble. You are even in danger. I had to come.’

The girl looked familiar. Ah, yes, Maria, her stepdaughter’s maid. What trick was this?

She sat up.

‘What do you want?’ she demanded.

The girl flinched at her sharp tones and lifted a tear-stained face to hers. And the duchess saw that her grief was genuine and regretted her harsh questioning.

‘Oh, do you too condemn me?’ asked Maria. ‘You looked on me so kindly the other day in the corridor that I thought —’

She faltered and was still. The duchess reached over and caressed her hair.

‘I am sorry,’ she said. ‘I know of nothing to condemn in you. But you are Julia’s maid and —’

‘I was,’ broke in the other, ‘but I will be no longer. Hear me out, my lady.’

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Brought out of herself by pity for another the duchess rose and, bending over, helped the girl to her feet.

'Here,' she soothed, 'sit down beside me and I shall be glad to listen. But I fear that I can do but little to help you with your trouble, whatever it may be, for I am alone and very weak.'

She took Maria's hand in her own.

'Now tell me,' she said softly.

Haltingly the girl began the story of the happenings in the chamber of the dark Julia on the day when all the trouble had begun. As she went on she gathered courage, disclosing everything, till the duchess gasped at the hideousness of it all.

'And the worst has happened,' Maria sobbed, 'so that I could no longer hide my shame from Umberto.'

'Umberto?'

'Umberto Lancia, captain of the castle guard. He is — he was my betrothed.'

The duchess sighed.

'Poor child!'

'He would know the name of the man. But how can I tell him? Umberto would — he would do something that would — would cause the duke to have him killed. Oh, I know!'

'So you have refused to tell him?'

'I have refused. He said that when he had

avenged himself upon the man he might forgive me. But he would only bring destruction on himself, for he is not the kind that strikes in the dark. And I love him too much to have him seized and — and killed!'

Sobbing, she buried her face in her hands. The duchess threw an arm around her.

'We are both in a sad plight, Maria,' she breathed. 'And you, at least, through no fault of your own. But somehow I cannot think that wickedness will prevail. Before you came I thought so, but not now. You have brought me great comfort.'

The girl looked up at her, gratitude in her eyes.

'I knew you would be kind to me,' she said. 'And I want to serve you. May I?'

'Yes, Maria.'

'And be near you always?'

'Yes.'

'Even if — well, I do not like to speak of the dungeon, but if you should go there?'

The duchess smiled. An angel in the darkness!

'Yes, child,' she told her, 'if they will let you come.'

Seizing her mistress's hand, Maria kissed it.

'I would die for you,' she murmured.

'No need for you to die, Maria,' murmured the duchess. 'Though I think that perhaps I —'

Maria clenched her fists.

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‘You will not die,’ she cried. ‘Not if I can prevent it.’

‘Sometimes it is not hard to die. Sometimes it is easier than to live.’

‘But you must not die,’ Maria insisted. ‘For you are, oh, so kind. You are a saint.’

Again she kissed the duchess’s hand.

The lady smiled sadly.

‘Alas, I am a sinner,’ she sighed.

‘So were the saints sinners,’ cried Maria. ‘Augustine — look at the things he did. And Peter denied Christ. And Paul persecuted the Christians. And Mary Magdalene — ’

There were tears in the duchess’s eyes as she breathed her answer.

‘Yes, the Magdalene found forgiveness, too, didn’t she?’



CHAPTER XXIII

FATHER UDO did not say mass on the day appointed for the test of miracles. Martin and the duke thought it better to have him bring in the coffer and deposit it upon the altar just before the consecration. They wanted to fasten his sacrilege upon him in such a way that it would stick, to have as many people as possible see that he was sponsor for the bones, and they chose this way as the most public.

The halt and the blind began to arrive at the chapel early. They came on crutches, holding to the arms of friends, tapping the ground with sticks, some skeptical, some with the light of hope in their faces.

Among them were many persons unknown to most of the citizens, for not all were beggars from the street corners. Rags and tatters were indeed there in abundance, but there was also a sprinkling of broadcloth.

Father Udo, peering out from the tiny sacristy where he waited nervously for the beginning of the service, recognized most of them — more, doubtless, than any other in the place, for in his cheering rounds he called at every house, high or low, where he had heard that there was affliction. But as his

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glance swept the crowd he observed some who were unknown even to him.

There was a ragged stranger with a distorted leg who limped in to squat down by a pillar. Whence could he have come? And that gray-haired blind man feeling his way along the wall? And the paralytic carried in by two stalwart fellows; by his dress and the solicitude of his attendants he should be a man of quality. But who was he? Father Udo blamed himself for not having found these sufferers before.

But even more he blamed himself for bringing on a situation in which so many trusting ones were bound to be disappointed. This, now that he thought of it, was even worse than his sacrilege. Here they were, come to rid themselves of their infirmities before the holy of holies by touching — what? Some bones no holier than those which dogs gnawed on the street corners — sheep bones or pigs' bones, or what might they not be?

They would touch them and — not one but would depart bearing the same burden of affliction that he had dragged up the long hill from the city. For though he had prayed and fasted he could not hope that good would come from sacrilege. Thus through his fault would their despair be even deeper than before. A ray of light they had seen, and after it would come deep darkness.

Heaven was not fond of frauds. But was that Count Gregorio against the wall near the door? Did the count really believe that —? He had said that he knew that there would be miracles. But how could he. He was thoroughly aware that those bones came from no saint.

Prayer and fasting! The count had advised them, too. And Father Udo had prayed till his knees were sore and fasted till he was faint from it, yet no matter what Count Gregorio hoped Father Udo felt that his prayers were unworthy and his self-denials vain. Heaven was — what was it — Heaven was not fond of frauds.

And that was what he was — a fraud. The duke knew it. Martin knew it. He was sure of that now. There they came, and Julia too, passing through the throng with an air of holding their noses. But the duchess had not come. Praise God for that!

Should he flee? Should he come out and confess his sin, asking the duke to punish that God might forgive? To what purpose now? The afflicted were already here. Their hopes were already raised. And the duchess?

No, he would go on, adding deception to deception, sin to sin. He might go to hell for it, but he would not go there a coward. He would go before the throne and say, ‘Perhaps you understand, oh, Lord.’

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And the Lord would understand. He would mete out eternal punishment — that was justice — but He would not look down upon this sinner as a quitter. He might find in him many other things to blame, but this one thing He would not find.

In the far part of the sacristy the castle chaplain gave a last touch to the arrangement of stole and chasuble, took up the blessed chalice, and turned toward the sanctuary. The manner of this other priest, preparing for the miracle of transubstantiation, was offhand, as though he were going about any ordinary piece of business, but instead of judging him for it Father Udo felt unworthy in his presence and shrank back, with his coffer of bones, as the chaplain passed by on his way to the altar.

‘Oh, to be like him,’ he yearned. ‘To be so free from sin that saying a mass would not strike dread into my heart!’

As a matter of fact Chaplain Pietro was a good bit of army material which had, through some error, found its way into the Church. He had most of the vices which are expected in a common soldier, without the soldier’s excuses for them. And if he could say mass without a tremor it was because the mass, like the rest of the sacraments, meant nothing to him. His only reaction to it was

distaste for the dilemma it presented — of getting up early and thus avoiding a late fast or sleeping all he would and consequently having his quite pampered stomach reproach him all through the sacrifice for having betrayed it.

But to the self-condemning Father Udo this man appeared almost as a saint. Tremblingly he watched him approach the altar, halt before it and remove his berretta, bowing to the crucifix. An eternity seemed to drag by while he made the usual preparations for beginning the service, mounting the altar steps and arranging the sacred vessels on the corporal cloth, opening the missal on the epistle side, and returning to the foot of the altar.

'In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritui Sancto.'

On his knees, Father Udo made the sign of the cross, then beat his breast.

'Judica me Deus —'

That psalm of judgment! It had never seemed so terrible! Yet perhaps there might be some comfort in it.

The chaplain mumbled the Latin, running through it like a galloping horse, but, by reason of years of reciting, Father Udo knew that psalm by heart:

'Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the

nation unholy. Deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man.'

As the celebrant raced along, Father Udo, with tears in his eyes, lifted his face to heaven. And if all that appeared to his physical vision was the top of the sacristy door, he was in spirit standing alone before his God, confessing his unworthiness and appealing for succor.

‘—The unjust and deceitful man.’

Not the duke, no! And not Martin. They had ceased to matter now. But deliver him from the consequences of his own sin, the sight of the afflicted going away in disappointment, the sound of their wails. The altar desecrated —

‘For thou art God my strength. Why hast thou cast me off? And why do I go sorrowful whilst the enemy afflicteth me?’

‘—Cast me off.’

O God! I have tried to do right. I am still trying. If I have done wrong it was through weakness, through blindness.

‘—And why do I go sorrowful whilst the enemy afflicteth me?’

Why? Oh, not those enemies who were conspiring against the duchess. And not the devil with forked tail and trident like that of old Neptune. But that spirit which said, ‘Udo, you have sinned

beyond forgiveness.' Yet perhaps all would be overlooked. Perhaps that spirit was lying. Was anything beyond forgiveness?

Sacrilege? But he had been trying so hard —

'*Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam,*' mumbled the priest before the altar.

'Send forth Thy light and Thy truth,' sobbed Father Udo.

God's truth, not the truth of Socrates or of any other of those old philosophers. An Ideal so veritable that it took account of other ideals. Let me know that in abandoning mere mundane truth I have not done too wrong. Tell me that you understand that I too was trying to fit more than one ideal into the plan of my life.

'O God,' he pleaded. 'Send me a sign!'

Chaplain Pietro mumbled on. He had the habit common to those who recite ceremonial words of running everything he said together so sadly that a good deal of it is unintelligible and of raising his voice for an instant immediately after taking a breath. He was in this respect somewhat like a whale, which swims along for a while half the time just visible and the rest completely submerged, then suddenly comes up to blow like a fountain, and having good lungs he both stayed under long and blew hard.

He came up on the words, '*Spera in Deo.*' Loud

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and strong the injunction sounded after the monotony of the rest of the reading.

Father Udo started. Was that a message for him, that ‘hope in God’ which the chaplain seemed to shout? Could it be — his sign?

Small chance, when the test of miracles was soon to come. What, save a miracle, could show him to be guiltless in the eyes of the power above? And how could these bones —?

He felt like a man borne oarless to the brink of a waterfall, carried closer and closer to destruction as the time for the test approached. The *Kyrie* and the *Gloria* passed. The book went from epistle to gospel side of the altar. The *Credo* was said, and the *Orate Fratres*. Now was the time appointed for him to bring forth the relics.

Clutching the hated coffer he stumbled to his feet and tottered through the door and across the space separating him from the altar.

Amid a terrific hush he mounted the steps and placed the box near the tabernacle.

‘*Miserere mei Deus*,’ he murmured.

Then groping his way down the steps again he fell to his knees at their foot.

‘Take my life, O God,’ he prayed. ‘Let them kill me. Let them torture me. But send me a sign that I have not incurred your everlasting displeasure.’

He recalled himself as a young man just entering the priesthood. How he had revered the saints in those days — even Udo the Great! And he remembered how he had told himself that being saintly shouldn't be so hard. Just do right and be kind and you'd be like a lot of saints. You might even be canonized.

In those days canonization had seemed to him the greatest thing that life could bring you. And to think of having people pray for your intercession and being able to do little favors for them before God! Back here on earth, too, your virtues might serve as a model for others. Oh, it was a great thing, and it hadn't seemed so hard then.

And now look at him! He had tried to be kind and to do right, had tried hard, and with the end of his life approaching — for he had a feeling that it was nearer than even the keenest doctor might suspect — he had but a sense of having done wrong, displeased God, the God whom he so loved.

He had lost track of the service. He came to with a start to hear Father Pietro reciting the last gospel. He couldn't follow it. Somehow the dissertation of John on the *Logos* was too much for him to-day.

‘— Full of grace and truth.’

The rest of that gospel had missed him but its

last words stuck with him, not meaning anything, just recurring and recurring.

The mass was over, the time had come.

‘Full of grace and truth.’

The duke gave him a sign, a peremptory motion to bring the relics down from the altar. He went for them and turned with them toward the congregation.

‘*Domine ad adjuvandam me festina!*’ he prayed, as he saw the crowd come forward through the open gates in the altar rail.

And when he descended the steps to meet them he tried to think of some other prayer for help. But all that came to his mind were those words of John, which ran through it in a maddening, almost audible refrain.

‘Full of grace and truth.’

He met them in the middle of the sanctuary, opening the box and extending it toward them as they came.

A crippled beggar from the downtown streets was first to plunge his hand into it — to plunge it in and withdraw it with a wail. He was still, just a crippled beggar.

A sigh of disappointment ran through the crowd. As it died out a rising murmur took its place. Here and there a laugh rang out. Here and there a sob was half stifled or let mount free to heaven.

Father Udo fell to his knees. He beat his breast. The test had failed. And why not? What had he expected? Hadn't he known all along that it would? Yes, but those sobs —

The people shrank back. Over there the duke was talking to a pair of halberdiers whom he had summoned. And he looked darkly at the priest as he gave them orders.

But here came another hopeful one, fighting against the tide of men and women pouring out of the sanctuary. It was one of the strangers whom Father Udo had noted in the crowd before mass, the ragged man with the distorted leg. Poor fellow!

Hobbling excitedly forward he plunged his hand into the box, brought forth a bone and pressed it against his knee.

Then it happened! Visibly, suddenly, the distorted leg snapped into place!

The stranger raised his hands to heaven.

'Praise God! Praise God!' he shouted. 'I am healed!'

Father Udo lifted his head. A mist appeared before his eyes. God had spoken! Now let anything happen that might. He knew that he had not done wrong in the eyes of his Creator — knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

The people paused on their way out. The tide

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turned back again. The paralytic's bearers shoved him to the front.

'Touch me with the bones, Father,' he pleaded. Father Udo brought forth the relics of Saint Udo — for now his whole story seemed to him to have become included in universal truth — and touched the man with them, on the hand and the foot, the knee and the neck. And the man sat up in his litter, then jumped to his feet and went away praising God, with his two bearers following after.

The strange blind man came. And saw!

Now they poured forward in droves, and were cured. Not all, it is true, but many — people whom Father Udo knew, whom he had visited upon their sick beds, to whom he had brought alms and words of cheer.

The chapel was in tumult. Prayers. Hysterical laughter. Sobs of joy.

The duke, turning to his halberdiers, found them on their knees, their weapons thrown aside. Looking for Martin, he saw him beating his breast.

Back against the far wall Count Gregorio stood, scratching his head. He had expected that the strangers would be cured. Had he not promised miracles? And did he not keep his promises like a man of honor?

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But this general casting out of devils was beyond him.

By Jove, Father Udo had been right in that old argument of theirs. Even a fake cripple might turn his gift to a useful purpose.

CHAPTER XXIV

FATHER UDO remained in the chapel longer than any one else, longer than the blind who had been given light or the lame who had been set with straight feet upon the pathway of life, for had he not seen a greater miracle than these and experienced a greater healing? Moreover, they had focused their attention upon the relics, had been healed by the bones of Saint Udo, while he, knowing so much about those bones, had been compelled to look beyond.

So when the last of those made whole had departed rejoicing Father Udo prostrated himself before the altar and offered praiseful thanks to the All-Merciful. For God had inclined unto his aid and by so doing had placed His stamp of approval upon the humanitarian philosophy which had for a time seemed to be scorned by Creator and creature. How else could you explain the miracles?

He talked to God as a thankful child might talk to a benevolent grown-up.

'I thank you, Lord. You have been very good to me. You saw that I meant to do right, and that was more than any of my fellow creatures could have seen. Forgive me for not having trusted you more.'

For an hour he prayed, not formally, not through a sense of duty, but because he wanted to. And

during that hour people were waiting for him without.

Duke Rufio had been among the first to leave the chapel. Seething with rage he had started for the post of the guard to order his men to clear the whole rabble out, but on the way over he had thought better of it. No use antagonizing the people. And those guardsmen in the chapel itself, they had caught the fever of it. Besides, the chapel was supposed to be sanctuary. You couldn't act in there the way you could elsewhere.

Here was a place in his own castle over which he had no jurisdiction! It belonged to the Lord, they said. And to-day they might as well say that it belonged to the rabble. Well, it was his own fault.

But the duke was not subdued by this show of miracles. By no means. He must take counsel with some one and —

Julia had gone to her room. Martin was — why, the fellow was still in the chapel, probably beating his silly breast. He and Julia were responsible for this, and now that they were needed they were not at hand.

Here came Martin now. What a crestfallen wretch he was!

‘How now, Martin?’ cried the duke. ‘You see where your damned caution has got us!’

Martin hung his head.

‘I do not understand it,’ he murmured.

‘Of course not!’ shouted the duke. ‘You don’t understand anything. All you know is caution.’

‘I have only tried to serve your grace.’

‘Yes,’ his grace fumed, ‘and what has happened. Bianca has run off with that Francesco whom you were told to do away with. This priest is made the greatest man in the duchy, and —’

He broke off with a gesture of his clenched fist.

‘I should have sworn that those relics were not real,’ pondered Martin. ‘Yet —’

He too failed to finish his sentence.

‘Now what shall I do?’ broke in the duke.

Martin was thinking hard. He was tremendously impressed by those miracles, but like many a person to whom symbols mean much he could not separate the visible cause from the visible effect. People had been cured by the bones of Saint Udo. That was all there was to that. He couldn’t see beyond those bones. Asked about it he might have said something about divine intercession, but it would have been a very hazy idea and would not have predicated divine intelligence. So he was ready to go on obeying the duke and working in exactly the same direction as before, but with certain reservations.

‘A dagger will divorce your Bianca from her husband whenever you please,’ he suggested.

‘It will indeed,’ raged the duke. ‘But what will divorce me from the duchess?’

Martin shrugged.

‘Give me time,’ he said, ‘and I shall think of a plan.’

The duke smiled.

‘That I will!’ he agreed. ‘And a good quiet place for it, too. Ho! Captain of the guard!’

The sentry who paced up and down across the courtyard took up the cry and other sentries passed it on till it reached the guardhouse. Soon Umberto Lancia came, walking rapidly, holding with his hand the sword at his side that it might not swing too hard and trip him.

Lancia was of middle height, broad-faced and brown-eyed. He was the sort of man on whom one expects and usually does see a smile, who is very handsome when that smile is there and not handsome at all when it is missing. And these few days the smile had been missing; in fact, for all its broadness his face appeared drawn.

Coming to attention before the duke he saluted.

‘Throw this fellow into the dungeon,’ ordered his grace. ‘And have your men arrest that priest as soon as he sets foot outside the chapel.’

Martin paled.

‘But, your grace ——’

At the first words of his master he had been

ready to plead for himself. But when he heard of the duke's purpose to arrest Father Udo he felt that it was more important to intervene in behalf of the priest. For he was sure that any move against the custodian of the miraculous relics would be attended by very hard luck indeed. Let the duke do anything he wanted about the duchess, commit any crime he pleased, that was all right. But against this particular priest in these particular circumstances —

He did not, however, plead for anybody. For the duke cut in on him.

'Silence! From now on I'll run things in my own way. Lancia, tell Bruno to prepare the rack. I'll have the truth out of that priest if I have to pull every limb from its socket.'

He smiled as Umberto, in obedience to orders, raised to his lips the whistle which hung from a silver chain about his neck and blew upon it his summons for the guard. He would have a showdown with that priest now. And such a stumbling block had Father Udo been that this seemed almost more important than finding out facts about the duchess.

Half a dozen halberdiers marched up. They halted before their captain.

'You men are to arrest Father Udo as soon as he enters the courtyard,' Umberto directed. 'I'll

come back here when I have turned key upon this prisoner.'

He marched Martin off. The men-at-arms stood at a little distance from the duke leaning on their halberds, their heads together, talking. After a few moments' earnest conversation one of them left the group and approached the ruler, bowing.

'Your grace,' said he, 'my comrades and I do not like to lay hands upon this holy man.'

'What?' roared the duke. 'You defy me?'

The soldier reddened.

'No, your grace,' he returned, 'but strange things have happened here to-day and we know that both you and we will suffer if we harm that holy priest.'

Furious, the duke clapped his hand upon his sword hilt. But the men stood, stubborn and impassive. No use dealing with such oxen!

'Report to the guardroom under arrest!' he ordered.

If Father Udo should come before Lancia's return he would arrest him himself.

The soldiers saluted and marched off, reporting at their headquarters to the sergeant of the guard, a hard-swearing, scar-covered old campaigner. He listened to the recital of their offense and the duke's order, then burst forth with a torrent of abuse.

'You damned, filthy dastards! Of all the

cowardly whelps I've ever seen you are the worst. If this ever happens again you'll be beaten till your armor feels like the iron widow upon you. Dismiss!

As they stacked their halberds he walked over to them.

‘Was his nibs mad?’ he asked.

They assured him very profanely that his nibs had been extremely mad and had shown no gratitude whatever for their earnest effort to shield him and themselves from the possible vengeance of Heaven. And the sergeant, having shed his official manner with the word ‘dismiss,’ said that he hoped to this and that place that the such and such duke didn’t make a so and so ass of himself by hurting a man who, as any what you call it fool could see, was under the protection of the saints; adding, rather redundantly, that he was a son of a something or other if he didn’t.

Meanwhile Umberto, having turned Martin over to the keeper of the dungeon, rejoined the duke.

‘Lancia,’ asked the latter, ‘are you afraid to put this priest under arrest? Are you an old woman like the rest of your soldiers?’

The young captain saluted.

‘Your grace,’ he owned, ‘a week ago I too would have been afraid. But now I consider nothing sacred in heaven or hell. I shall arrest him.’

‘Good!’ smiled the duke. ‘But what is the matter, Lancia? Why this strange talk about “a week or two ago,” and why is that smile of yours lacking these days?’

Umberto sighed. He was thinking of Maria, of how her eyes had shone on the night when they had plighted their troth. Perhaps he should — but no.

‘A woman,’ he muttered, becoming stern.

The duke nodded.

‘None should understand as well as I,’ he replied, ‘for I find that I can trust none of them. Was she unfaithful to you?’

‘She said that she loved me. Then one day I found out that she — yes.’

The duke put a hand upon his shoulder.

‘It is sad, my boy,’ he said. ‘But cheer up. There is always a better one around the corner. And perhaps she has done you a favor. For you’ll be well repaid for a very little work to-day. I promise you that.’

He stopped.

‘Here comes the priest!’ he whispered.

Father Udo, his face radiant, stepped into the courtyard. Being at peace with his own soul he was at peace with the world, even with the duke. Heaven had been kind and forgiving. He didn’t ask the why or how of it, for the ways of the Lord were inscrutable.

S A I N T U D O

Umberto went to meet him.

'I have orders to arrest you, Father,' he said.

Father Udo halted, but no cloud shadowed his smile. Nor did he demand the reason or offer to argue.

'Bless you, my son,' was his reply. 'One infinitely worthier than I was arrested and deserted by His friends and nailed upon a cross. And if He did not resist why should I?'

Lancia, who had been prepared for any sort of argument, trembled at the priest's gentleness. A while ago he had felt grand in his sullenness, now he felt puny and silly.

The priest waited. At last he questioned Umberto, since the latter said nothing and made no further move.

'Where do we go now?' he asked. 'To the dungeon?'

Umberto nodded.

'Then let us go quickly,' Father Udo suggested. 'And may the Lord forgive you, and' — with a look at the scowling author of his trouble — 'his grace the duke.'



CHAPTER XXV

M^Y LADY!

Maria had long been peering into the castle yard from one of the slitlike windows of the duchess's chamber. For she had seen some one down there for whom her heart yearned, and she feasted her eyes upon his loved form. But as she spoke there was no hint of this in her voice, only an overpowering horror.

The duchess looked up, startled.

'Yes, Maria.'

'They have arrested Father Udo. And, oh, God ——'

She fell to her knees, sobbing. The duchess crossed the room and hovered over her.

'What is it, child?'

'It was Umberto who did it.'

Small wonder that she suffered, since the news of the morning's miracles had penetrated even to the shunned apartment where the two women dwelt.

'Umberto took him to the dungeon. He took him and —— Oh, Umberto!'

The duchess shuddered.

'Dress yourself, child,' she directed, 'for I feel that I shall soon need a friend to stand by me and pity me.'

Maria dragged herself to her feet.

‘Oh, Blessed Mary, mother of God,’ she prayed, ‘find forgiveness for my lover!’

‘It is not Captain Lancia’s fault,’ the duchess soothed. ‘He can only obey. For any sin committed to-day the duke will alone be responsible.’

Maria turned, sobbing, to dress.

‘I know that Umberto would not have done this if it had not been for — for what happened to me,’ she wept. ‘Oh, my lady, my duchess, if I could but save him from himself!’

Shaking her head in pity the duchess looked after her.

‘Try to be brave,’ she said. ‘And dress yourself simply. For unless I much mistake me I shall soon be called to the torture chamber.’

Calmly the duchess went about making her own toilette. She chose the most severe of her clothes, almost a penitential garb, free from the ruffles and collars of the day. She let her hair hang down in long, smooth coils across her shoulders and left her feet bare. Observing what she did, Maria copied her mode as well as her wardrobe would permit, then came to join her.

‘You are beautiful, my lady,’ she breathed. ‘Your hair and your throat —’

‘Hush, Maria,’ the duchess interrupted. ‘It is no time to talk of beauty. And put on your shoes. I am the one with a sin to confess, not you.’

Maria gasped.

‘You are going to confess?’ she marveled.

‘I cannot let Father Udo suffer for me,’ the duchess replied.

Falling to her knees Maria kissed the lady’s hand.

‘Perhaps you will save Umberto’s soul,’ she murmured.

Then she rose and stood away a little, her eyes big as she gazed on her mistress.

‘Why,’ she cried, ‘you look like Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows! And they will kill you!’

‘What matter?’

‘You will be stoned to death. Oh, I can’t bear it.’

She ran from the apartment, leaving the duchess alone.

But Maria was not deserting the duchess. Suddenly strong with the strength of despair, she was going in quest of something. Down cold stone stairs her bare feet padded and along gloomy corridors to a chamber which she knew only too well. None paid attention to her, for amid the excitement of the morning a hurrying girl was nothing to remark, and no one saw her halt at the door of Julia’s bower, pause for an instant, and dart in.

She had hoped that she would not find Julia there, that she might get the thing she sought

without being discovered, but in this she was disappointed. Her former mistress, lying lazily upon the bed, looked up furious as Maria burst into the room.

‘How dare you come in here without knocking?’ cried Julia. ‘You know that none may enter my chamber unless they are bidden. I’ll have you —’

The threat which she was about to utter died away in her throat and her eyes stared in horror at Maria as the girl advanced. For there was something deadly in the silence of the intruder, in the steadiness of her gaze and the slow sureness of her movement across the room.

Julia had never known fear, and now that it seized her she found it dreadful. She reached a trembling hand for something beneath her pillow while her eyes remained watching Maria with the fascination of fright. If she could only get —

Then Maria sprang upon her, catching her wrist and pulling her hand away. A frantic effort and Julia wrenched it loose. It closed over the thing she sought — and Maria’s hand closed again over hers. Thus they struggled silently till Maria, kneeling upon her prostrate mistress, wrenched the thing from her.

Julia shrieked — once.

Maria left the room with the thing for which she

had come. Julia did not try to prevent her, but lay, strangely still and white, upon the bed, not looking at her, not saying a word.

Back along the corridors and up the stairs ran Maria. She hoped that the duchess would still be there, that they would not have sent for her and dragged her off before she could know that the only friend left her had not deserted her.

Her hope was fulfilled. The duchess sat calmly there, hands folded, waiting for whatever might befall.

‘Why, Maria,’ she asked as the girl returned, panting, ‘where have you been?’

‘I went to get something I needed,’ the maid replied.

‘Good girl,’ said the duchess, with a sad smile. ‘I thought you had deserted me.’

‘I shall never desert you.’

‘And what did you go to get in such a hurry?’

‘Oh,’ shrugged Maria, ‘a cross. Or something very like a cross.’

She put on her shoes, then sat down at the duchess’s feet. But Maria could not stay seated for more than a minute or two at a time. She was up and down again, across the room to the window, over to the door. Thus she moved nervously for two hours, while the duchess sat with her hands folded.

Then the lady arose.

'I am afraid to wait longer,' she said. 'Father Udo may be on the rack. He may have been there these two hours. Let us go down.'

'Yes,' breathed Maria, 'let us go.'

Even as they moved toward the door there came the tramp of heavy feet on the stairs. The duchess stepped into the hall.

'You have come for me?' she asked, as two pike-men drew up and saluted.

'Yes, my lady,' replied one of the men. 'We are sorry, but —'

'I know,' interrupted the duchess. 'Come, Maria.'

She led the way down stairs and corridors toward the chamber of horrors, and Maria, who followed close behind her, could not but wonder at the erectness of her carriage and the firmness of her step. How was it possible to go to meet death and disgrace with an air as proud as one might use to greet subjects who brought petitions and supplications? ↗

To the girl all was shot with uncertainty. They were moving toward she knew not what terrible thing. That the duchess was calm because she felt the hand of Fate was something far beyond her comprehension. For to one sort of spirit the touch of the inevitable is soothing, blotting out all the

petty things of the moment, while to another it is horrible.

So Maria, who had nothing to fear, found herself impelled more and more to cleave to her doomed mistress for comfort. The grim parade along the ringing hallways of the castle, with the two men at arms — how was she to know that they looked shamefaced and unhappy — stalking along in the rear, was bad enough. The descent down a spiral stairway into a sort of well, the mildewy breath of the low tunnel which led off from its bottom, the drip of water, the sliminess of the floor as they felt their way along in the dark were ghastly.

She even forgot for the moment the reassuring touch of that thing, ‘very like a cross,’ which she had brought from the apartment of Julia. But only for a moment. Then her hand sought it out and caressed it as it lay against her bosom.

Now a tiny crack of light showed ahead of them and they paused before a heavy door that shut off the chamber beyond. The sudden thud as one of the pikemen pounded upon it with the butt of his weapon so startled the girl that she almost shrieked aloud.

She heard the duke’s voice from within.

‘Is she come?’

‘Yes, my lord,’ returned the man. ‘And her maid with her.’

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'Her maid? Did I tell you to bring her maid?'

Perhaps they would not let her in. Oh, that would be a relief! For one instant Maria prayed that they would not, then realized that she must enter. She must! Think of the duchess in there alone! Think of Umberto's soul!

'It is I,' she cried; and her fearful heart seemed to rise into her throat, choking her, 'that Maria who was once my lady Julia's maid. Surely, your grace ——'

'Oh, well. Send them in. Remain on guard without.'

The door swung open. Maria followed the duchess in. It clanged shut behind them.

At first the girl's eyes were blinded by the light, feeble though it was, of the torture chamber. She saw a torch flaring smokily in a bracket on the far wall, that was all. But her ears caught the heavy breathing of one who was in great pain and would not cry out.

Then she beheld Umberto. He was standing behind a chair in which sat the duke, and his eyes were troubled. He could not stand her gaze, he who had stood in judgment upon her, but looked shamefacedly away. Then, as his fascinated glance was drawn to something which he did not want to see, he started visibly.

Maria's eyes followed his stare, and her blood

ran cold. For she saw Father Udo lying stretched out upon the floor, his ankles lashed to two iron rings in the masonry, his wrists to a bar which was in turn fastened to a windlass.

His whole body was pulled taut as a bow-string. His face was distorted with pain, and between his gritted teeth his breath came in great gasps.

But his eyes were strangely serene, as though there were something behind that horrid mask that could not be touched by torture.

At the huge wooden wheel which turned the windlass stood Bruno, the executioner, savage as a ferocious dog, and as faithful to his master. His hairy body was stripped to the waist and his lips were parted in a fanged grin.

‘Merciful Heaven!’

The duchess had seen, too. She reeled against Maria, grasping her shoulder for support. The girl thrust her hand into the bosom of her robe and kept it there.

The duke smiled blandly. His eyes gleamed in the reddish light.

‘Well, lady,’ he sneered, ‘Father Udo has told me some strange things.’

A gasp from the figure on the floor. A hoarse whisper from the parched lips of the priest.

‘I have told him nothing.’

The duke raised his eyebrows.

‘So?’ he breathed. ‘I thought you were beyond speech. Another turn on the wheel, Bruno.’

The torturer bended his knotty back. On the wall his shadow moved grotesquely. But before he could move the wheel the duke held up a hand.

‘Hold,’ he murmured. ‘Let us first see if my fair duchess has anything to say.’

Maria felt the duchess release her shoulder, saw her stand a moment swaying, then totter against the damp wall in near collapse.

A chill swept her whole being. Could she be stronger than her mistress? She clutched the thing within her breast and strove to speak, but her trembling lips would form no words.

‘All right, Bruno. Another turn.’

The duke was enjoying his moment of cruelty.

The wheel moved. And with its first creaking the girl found voice.

‘Let me speak, your grace,’ she choked out.

‘You?’

Maria stepped forward.

‘Yes, your grace. For the past little time I have been her sole companion, and I can tell you much.’

‘Maria!’

It was the duchess who sobbed her name in the agony of betrayal.

The duke beamed. His hand sought his beard. On one finger was a ring of Roman mosaic.

'I can show you proofs,' Maria continued, still advancing. And as she approached the haughty ruler sitting there the chill left her and the blood pulsed in her temples.

A moment she stared over his head full at Umberto, then met the tyrant's eye again as her cheeks flushed hotly.

'Your grace — I am a woman — I would serve you — as I have served your daughter — and —'

She was close to him now, standing almost over him. His smile showed his white teeth as he gazed curiously up into her face.

A gold buckle shone on his breast. Just this side was the heart.

Her hand flashed from her bosom. In it was something that glinted, red as blood, in the torch-light as she struck.

He threw up his hand, too late. The dagger that had been Julia's buried itself in his breast beside the golden buckle. And as she drew it forth for another blow her hand was bathed in a warm stream, red with a redness that came not from the smoking torch.

'As I have served your daughter!' she cried, and struck again.

When the knife had gone in to the guard, she released it. Her work was done.

The duke's smile had faded. His jaw dropped

and a look of surprise overspread his dark features. Clutching at the jeweled hilt that protruded from his chest he half rose, then with a faint cough that was almost a chuckle he crumpled up, crashing back over the chair to the floor.

A single convulsive movement and he lay still.

Horrified, Umberto seized her wrist.

'Woman,' he gasped, 'you have —'

Maria's eyes met his, serene, unafraid.

'You asked me to show you the man, Umberto,' she said. 'There he is.'

Open-mouthed he stared at her.

'I couldn't tell you before,' she went on, all the tenseness gone from her now, a sudden sob half choking her. 'You would have — have done something rash.'

Blindly she groped for him, but just as he seemed about to receive her in his arms his attitude changed and he thrust her aside. For he saw what she, her back being turned, could not see — the hairy Bruno charging down upon them from his place at the wheel.

Despairing, she clutched at his arm, hampering him so in the drawing of his sword that the giant was upon them before he could prepare for it. As Bruno's twitching hands sought her, he threw her reeling against the wall and was himself caught in their vice-like grip.

Too late Maria saw what was happening, saw Bruno's hands upon Umberto's throat and the captain trying in vain to break their throttling hold.

Forgetting her own safety she rushed to his aid, losing precious moments in which she might have recovered the dagger from the breast of the duke. Indeed, in the excitement of the moment, she forgot all about the dagger.

Even as her frantic fists beat harmlessly upon him, Bruno forced Umberto back against the wall. They struck the torch and knocked it from its socket to the floor where it lay still burning dully, and the room was enveloped in shadows and smoke.

'Now you die,' grunted the executioner. 'And then the women.'

One moment Maria's heart froze. Then it leaped. The torch!

Stooping she snatched it from the floor, then rose to plunge it into Bruno's face.

With a yell he staggered back, releasing Umberto. A moment he clutched at his eyes, then, roaring, returned to the attack. But the captain's sword was out now and his plunge drove him upon it, so that it went clear through his body and out a hand's breadth from his back.

Bruno staggered away a pace, and as Umberto drew out the sword he fell backward over the body

of the duke. For a long minute the young man stood rubbing his throat, then remembering himself he bowed to the duchess, who still leaned, pale as death, against the far wall.

‘I am sorry, my lady,’ he said, ‘that the executioner slew your husband. He must have gone mad. But you see, I have avenged him.’

The woman who was now ruler of Colenna eyed him a moment, uncomprehending. Then, as she realized his meaning, she drew herself together and stood straight again.

She half smiled, but the smile faded as her gaze fell upon Father Udo, still stretched out there upon the rack.

‘Cut him loose,’ she gasped.

Leaping to the priest’s side, while Maria held the torch high, Umberto slashed away the ropes that bound him.

‘Guards!’ he cried. ‘Open the door!’

The great barrier swung open and the pikemen pushed into the room.

‘What is it?’ they inquired as they stood blinking at the light.

‘Bruno has killed the duke!’ declared Umberto. ‘But I have saved the duchess, thank Heaven.’

The men looked at each other. Then they advanced to bend over the two bodies.

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'Look at the dagger he used,' marveled one.
'Jeweled ——'

'Like the one that my lady Julia sometimes wore,' added the other.

'Never mind that,' Umberto cut in. 'Leave those two. They're dead. Carry this poor priest somewhere and put him to bed. See, he has fainted.'

Father Udo's face was serene now, as serene as his eyes had been before. The duchess laid a tender hand upon his forehead.

'Take him to my chamber,' she directed. 'And, oh, be gentle with him!'

CHAPTER XXVI

A GREAT silence and a great void. Strange, fantastic dreams that followed each other reasonlessly across the horizon of consciousness. Bruno pulling at the wheel. The duke's hand stroking his beard. A woman —

Now the roaring of waters — such waters. Even the ocean that stretched, so they said, from the far coasts of Britain to the edge of the world could not make such a sound. And bells and —

The duke's hand stroking his beard. A woman. The duke had made a very great mistake. What a great mistake! It had something to do with that woman. What was she about, anyhow?

She was a good woman. He had let her know that he felt that way about her one day in the monastery garden. She was a very good woman. Only unlucky. Too bad that good people were so unlucky!

But Prince Gustav was good, and he wasn't unlucky. Probably there wasn't any real connection between goodness and luck. Except that good people could usually stand their luck better.

What was that about Prince Gustav and the devil? Oh, yes, that was only a dream, but he'd have to tell the prince about it. It was awfully funny, and the prince did appreciate a joke.

The floor wasn't so uncomfortable as it had

seemed a while ago. It was really quite soft. But then when a fellow's body was pulled tight on the rack he didn't touch the floor.

Still, his body didn't feel so tight. Not the way it had just now before the woman had spoken to the duke. Such a mistake the duke had made!

'Is he conscious?'

That voice from away off there somewhere must be talking about him. Of course he was conscious. But he didn't want the torchlight in his eyes. It hurt.

He would open them, though, just to show that he was really conscious. Then maybe he would find out about the duke's mistake. He couldn't remember exactly what it had been, but he would know when he opened his eyes.

His eyelids were very heavy. Such little things to weigh so much! But he could lift them. There!

Father Udo sighed. Everything was so quiet. And there were two torches. Strange. Just a little while ago there had been but one.

No, they weren't torches, either. They were candles, wax candles like the ones on the altar. And wasn't that a crucifix between them? And beyond them stood Abbot Lorenzo.

A most wonderful thing! To close your eyes on the duke and that woman and the torch and to open them on candles and the abbot. But all things were possible to God.

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The abbot was coming around the table whereon stood the candles and the crucifix. He had a ciborium in his hands — a vessel of gold. But even gold wasn't good enough for the Blessed Sacrament. Still, God didn't really mind.

The abbot withdrew the sacred wafer from the precious container. Father Udo received it between his lips. God was very kind.

There were more people in the room, too. And it seemed a different sort of room from the torture chamber. It had a high ceiling and through the corner of his eye he could catch the top of twin gothic windows.

Why did those people stay back where he could not see them? He wished them no harm. He wished no one any harm. Not even the duke.

Ah, the duchess. She was a good woman, but oh, so very unfortunate. Even more unfortunate than that other good woman. The duke wanted to put her to death. But where was the duke?

The duchess bended over him. There were tears in her eyes.

'Don't cry,' he murmured. 'I shall never tell him.'

Poor woman! Why should she break down at that? Why should she kneel beside his bed — he was in a bed, wasn't he — and sob?

He heard another voice. It said a strange thing.

'He doesn't know the duke is dead,' it said.

Of course he didn't know anything of the sort. Or did he? There was something about that woman — the one the duke had made the mistake about. Funny, there were kinds of mistakes, just as there were kinds of people. There were good mistakes and bad mistakes. Only, like people, you couldn't always tell about them.

Still, you could tell about the duke's mistake. It had been a bad one — bad for the duke. And the duke was dead.

Where had the duchess gone? And the abbot? They were both here a moment ago and now it was Count Gregorio who stood by his bedside.

Count Gregorio was a fine man. He had real faith. Oh, yes, he was a free-thinker, but he had faith. He had said that there would be miracles, and there had been miracles. The count had expected them even when Father Udo hadn't. And it took faith to make miracles.

Again that noise came to him, the noise like the ocean. He had never seen the ocean but he supposed that it looked very much like the sea. When you stood on the point near Livorno, you couldn't see to the end of the sea. And you couldn't see to the end of the ocean. Sort of like eternity.

Which was like eternity? The sea or the ocean? The sea had another shore — Africa, where the

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Moors lived. The ocean didn't. It just stretched away to the end of things. But maybe the ocean really had another shore. Nobody had been out there. And he liked to think that eternity had one.

The count was still there.

'Count Gregorio,' said Father Udo.

The count looked sort of wistful. He hoped that the poor fellow wasn't in trouble. Maybe he'd had bad news about Francesco.

Father Udo didn't like to see people look wistful. He'd have to try to get the count's mind off his trouble, whatever it was. He'd ask him about that noise — the noise like the sea.

'That noise?' he whispered.

The count listened. A tear ran down his nose. Such a long nose for a tear to run down.

'The people,' choked he. 'They are praying for you. Out there in the courtyard. And all over town.'

Praying for him! Wasn't that a kind thing to do!

'And they are saying masses in the chapel here and at the abbey. The bishop is saying mass on the high altar of the cathedral, too. Oh, old friend, we are all praying for you.'

The bishop was praying for him! The bishop was a prince of the Church — or was it a lord of the Church? Well, anyhow, the bishop was very kind.

And the abbot. He was kind, too. Hadn't he

brought him Communion? And he was such a busy man, trying to win back the friendship of the castle.

Oh! Now that the duke was dead — why —

‘You see, your grace,’ Father Udo spoke as loud as he might, trusting that the abbot was within earshot, ‘the castle and the abbey are on good terms again. Things just have to come out right, don’t they?’

A door creaked very gently on its hinges. Some one was trying to be very quiet about opening it.

‘Does he still live?’ asked a voice.

That sounded like Prince Gustav. Here was luck! He could tell him about that dream.

‘I came as fast as horses would carry me,’ he heard the prince say. ‘And here are Francesco and Bianca.’

Francesco and Bianca! But they were in danger. Oh, no. How foolish of him. The duke was dead. That mistake of his —

Francesco and Bianca. Now they were standing where the count had stood.

‘My little Bianca,’ smiled the priest.

He lifted his hand just the slightest bit. It was so heavy. He must be getting old.

‘You are happy with your Francesco?’ he inquired as his eyes sought hers.

She nodded and swallowed hard. She didn’t

look happy. But she wouldn't lie to him. No, Bianca wouldn't lie.

He smiled at Francesco.

'Be good to her, Francesco,' he sighed.

Bianca bended close over him.

'Are you in pain?' she asked.

In pain? Why should she think that he was in pain? A little numb, perhaps, just comfortably so. But in pain? He shook his head.

She kissed his forehead. Angels! Cherubim and seraphim — His little Bianca.

'I want to tell Prince Gustav about a dream I had,' he said.

And sure enough, there was the prince, between Bianca and Francesco.

'I want to tell you about it,' Father Udo went on, 'because I'm afraid I might forget it. It was a very funny dream and you were in it.'

'I dreamed that I went to hell and you came and asked the devil to let me go. He wouldn't do it and you said, "We'll see about that," and went away very angry. Then pretty soon there was a commotion in the sky and along came Saint Udo the Martyr with a book in his hand. He shook his finger at the devil and opened the book.'

'The devil read a few lines and then he said, "Oh, excuse me. I didn't know." And he let Saint Udo have me.'

‘So when we were leaving there I asked Saint Udo if the book was the Bible. And he said, “No, it’s Prince Gustav’s diary.” Wasn’t that funny?’

Prince Gustav did not look as though he thought it was funny. He moved his lips but remained discreetly silent. For strong men have a horror of bursting into tears.

‘And the funniest part of it,’ Father Udo persisted, ‘is that there isn’t any Saint Udo the Martyr.’

Now the prince did speak, braving the danger that lurked in his hot throat.

‘Don’t you think it,’ he declared. ‘There is a Saint Udo the Martyr, but you’re too humble to see it.’

He turned away to hide his feelings. And as he stood thus he heard Father Udo gasp.

‘Look!’ The priest was pointing in surprised rapture toward the ceiling.

‘What is it?’

‘The Saviour!’

They buried him beneath the new altar in the castle chapel, the altar whereon had been graven the inscription, ‘Holy Udo, Martyr.’ And though the counterfeit relics which had played such a part in his tragedy were not placed with him, the rumor went abroad that they were there. For who would

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not think thus with such an inscription to mislead him?

Every Wednesday and Friday the people of the city were allowed to visit the tomb — for not being consecrated it was technically not an altar. And faith in the miraculous powers of the bones supposed to be within it remained great.

People said, ‘The good priest is still there with his comforting relics.’

During the next century many votive offerings were left there, and crutches and canes were piled high about it by those whom faith had made whole. Then either the altar was consecrated or the knowledge that it had not been was lost, for masses of healing were said twice a week upon the altar of Saint Udo the Martyr.

CHAPTER XXVII

CARDINAL GUIDO ARONDA had a passion for martyrs. He knew by heart the ‘Martyrologium Hieronymianum’ and the ‘Parvum Martyrologium Romanum,’ or if not by heart at least quite remarkably well. And his views on martyrdom were such that he might have been glorified with something of the sort himself in 1559 had not the intolerant Pope Paul IV been called on to another world and the much milder Pius IV been chosen to succeed him.

For Cardinal Aronda, like many little men with sharp eyes and bulging foreheads, was most outspoken, and he once declared in the presence of a certain fanatic that true martyrdom depended not so much upon the cause for which a man died as upon his belief in it.

The fanatic was shocked, perhaps because viewed in such light he had assisted at the making of several martyrs himself.

‘How about heretics?’ he demanded sweetly.

He always did things sweetly, which was scarcely to his credit, since some of his deeds would have been more forgivable if done in anger.

Cardinal Aronda didn’t like him. He preferred people who could, like himself, be blunt when the occasion seemed to demand it. And his

dislike caused him to speak perhaps a little overboldly.

‘What do you mean by heretics?’ he retorted. ‘There has never been a prophet who was not a heretic. Progress is impossible without them. The Apostles were heretics in their day.’

The other nodded gravely.

‘So,’ he purred, ‘you see no distinction between heretics and prophets. A very interesting point of view.’

‘No such thing,’ retorted the cardinal. ‘A prophet is simply a heretic who happens to be right. They are few and far between. But the man who dies for a thing, right or wrong, in which he believes, dies for what he considers the will of God. Is that not martyrdom?’

All of which was reported to Rome, where it was pointed out to the aged Paul that the cardinal was evidently out of sympathy with certain repressive measures then being taken for the good of the faith. And the fanatic, who disliked blunt men quite as much as the cardinal disliked their opposite, suggested that when such disloyalty crept into high places something should be done about it.

Something would quite likely have been done, too, had not the Pope died, making way for Giovanni Angelo Medici, who was elevated to the throne of Saint Peter under the title of Pius. He

happened to be a very close friend of the accused as well as a quite liberal person for those days, and the matter dropped right there. Cardinal Aronda was spared and in fact became very influential under this pontiff and under his successor, Gregory XIII.

It was he who suggested to the latter the need for a new martyrology, and he collaborated with Baronius in the preliminary work of compiling one. This was prompted by his visit to Colenna in the year 1562, the story of which is of interest here.

He was guest of the abbot of Saint Holdo's, and as was his custom he spent much time in the monastery library looking for rare writings. There he came upon a palimpsest in the hand of a monk who, to judge from the type of his minuscule, must have lived some two centuries before.

It was called 'The Life of Saint Udo the Martyr.'

The cardinal had never heard of Saint Udo the Martyr. Eager for enlightenment he read the book through. Then he went with it to the abbot.

'Do you know anything of this saint?' he asked. 'He seems a very holy man, yet I know nothing of him.'

The abbot beamed.

'Why, yes,' said he, highly pleased, for the monastery was proud of its only saint. 'And why should I not, since he is one of our own priests?'

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The cardinal tipped his head sidewise and fingered his cheek.

‘But he is not in the “Martyrologium,”’ he objected.

The abbot shrugged, then lifted his eyes to heaven.

‘Ah,’ he exclaimed, ‘what legions of martyrs may not be in that book? Anyhow, there is no denying that miracles have been — and still are — worked at the grave of Saint Udo.’

‘Indeed!’ Cardinal Aronda was beginning to feel the urge of that passion of his. ‘And where is this grave?’

‘Under the side altar of the castle chapel,’ the abbot informed him. ‘The poor of the city hold saint and tomb in great reverence. They tell marvelous tales of him, too, though of course these stories may have become more or less distorted, coming down from mouth to mouth. It would perhaps be worth your while to — ’

But he had lost his audience. Cardinal Aronda was off like a hound that has just caught a fresh scent, out the garden gate and across the city to the castle. There in the chapel he found the altar inscribed ‘Holy Udo, Martyr,’ nor did he need the inscription to locate it, so high was the ring of crutches and canes and garlands about it.

This altar troubled the cardinal. Only the bones

of regularly canonized saints should be incorporated in an altar. Unless there were some other relics there —

Looking about him he spied the aged castle sacristan arranging some flowers on the high altar. Having seen the cardinal enter the sacristan he had made himself unobtrusively conspicuous in the hope that he might be honored by a few words with such an eminent churchman. And now his hopes were realized to the utmost, for with a compelling '*psst*' the cardinal beckoned to him.

Hurriedly the ancient made a one-foot-at-a-time descent of the altar steps and limped over.

'I was wondering about this altar,' the cardinal began. 'Can you tell me whose relics are contained in it?'

'But surely,' puffed the old man, pointing. 'See. It is on that tablet. Holy Udo, Martyr.'

Cardinal Aronda rubbed his chin.

'Are there no others?' he asked.

Mystified, the other shook his head.

'No,' said he. 'This is Saint Udo's altar. You see. It is on the tablet. Holy Udo —'

The cardinal raised his hand.

'Yes, I know,' he broke in. 'But somehow I — Can you tell me anything about him?'

New and deeper creases appeared among the wrinkles about the old man's eyes, proclaiming

that he was pleased. Indeed he could tell much if his eminence desired it. And for an hour he held his listener spellbound, partly with the stories which he told and partly with the way in which he waggled his white beard as he talked.

Cardinal Aronda gave serious attention. He had encountered such old men before and was thoroughly aware that their stories required some discounting and much verifying. The thing that he wanted particularly was to get hold of some points on which he might check up. Recent local miracles could be investigated. But beyond that —

‘He was put to death by order of the last Duke Rufio,’ concluded the ancient. ‘Ah, a very wicked man, that Duke Rufio. And during the process of torture the executioner went mad and killed the duke. There you see the hand of God, your eminence.’

‘But,’ murmured the cardinal for the second time that day, ‘he is not in the “Martyrologium.”’

‘No,’ returned the sacristan, who did not quite understand, ‘he is in heaven.’

Whereupon the cardinal pursed his lips very thoughtfully. Things were not as they should be. Masses said on a relicless altar — or a martyr in heaven and not in the Martyrology. Either the holy martyr must be given his proper place or —

Let’s see. The last Rufio. Were there any

writings of that period to which one might turn? There were not likely to be any in Colenna, for that had been a most barren period there in a literary way. But elsewhere?

How about the diary of Prince Gustav, a strange book, so he had heard, full of disjointed bits of philosophy and comments upon his times? The prince had been a sort of roundsman for the Emperor in those old days. Doubtless he had visited Colenna, and such a holy person as the Saint Udo of the monk's manuscript and the miraculous grave could not well have escaped his notice.

Cardinal Aronda reproached himself for having failed to read the prince's diary sooner. He understood that it was preserved in Munich, and thither he journeyed, moved by that ruling passion of his. There he found the whole story, or what he believed to be the whole story, of a certain Father Udo, who could not but be the saint in question.

There was no mention of certain things which it was just as well that the cardinal should not see, such as the spurious bones or the counterfeit saint whose relics they were supposed to be, for being a forward-looking person the prince had edited his book with care. So that the worthy man who now read it had indeed no reason to doubt that this

Udo and the Udo of the monkish manuscript were one and the same.

On his return to Rome he laid his evidence of the sanctity of the priest Udo before his friend the Pope.

'This man, so far as I can discover, has never been canonized, your holiness,' he said. 'Yet he is obviously deserving of it.'

'Indeed?' was his holiness's non-committal reply.

'Moreover,' pursued the cardinal, who knew certain failings of his friend, 'it seems to me that he should be made a saint to legalize the saying of mass on his altar, which has been going on for a long time.'

Whereupon the Holy Father inclined his head gravely.

'Yes,' he agreed, 'it would perhaps be better to make the relics in that altar true relics of a saint *ex post facto* than to invalidate many good masses which have been said there. Of course the question of validity may be debatable, but ——'

As he did not continue, but broke off in the middle of the sentence, Cardinal Aronda took up the conversation.

'The holiness of Udo of Colenna is not debatable,' he assured the pontiff. 'And so many miracles have been worked at his altar that ——'

'As you say, it would be a shame to invalidate so many good masses,' the Pope went on, for as Cardinal Aronda had rightly judged he was to be influenced by one thing while the cardinal was moved by another. 'Yes, it would be a very great shame.'

'Then you think that it would be well to institute proceedings looking toward canonization?'

The Holy Father did think so. And as in those days the devil's advocate had not all the zeal that he was endowed with under Innocent XIV the time came when amid gorgeous ceremonies the Church elevated to the rank of the saints one Udo of Colenna, who would have been most surprised if he had known about it.

Perhaps he did know. Those things are beyond us.

Immelmann, the German critic, dug up the later facts about him along about 1892, showing that the Udo of the monk was not the Udo of Prince Gustav. But as Immelmann was never friendly to the Church he has been more or less discredited. And to-day two groups of people venerate Saint Udo the Martyr.

They are those who do not believe Immelmann — and among them may be included those who have never heard of him — and those who contend that the priest deserved canonization anyhow.

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Von Mueller, Immelmann's colleague at Heidelberg, ranks among the latter. He remarks:

'The worst that can be said of Udo of Colenna is that he was his own patron saint and tried to be worthy of himself, which may not be such a bad idea after all.'

THE END





